

HOG HELLSCAPE || THE POLITICS OF *PARASITE*

BARRY YEOMAN

E. TAMMY KIM

JANUARY 13/20, 2020

THE Nation.



ARUNDHATI ROY

INDIA

Portents of an Ending

Modi, the RSS, and the rise of the Hindu far right.



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—Hosted by **Jon Wiener**

Letters

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Is a Deficit Really a Strength?

In “Red Ink. The New Black?” [December 2/9], Marshall Auerback advocates extremism on federal deficit spending. But it is not clear to me what his attitude is on the progressive presidential candidates’ proposals for increased taxes on the wealthy. Would he advocate making huge new expenditures on Medicare for All and the Green New Deal with no offsetting revenue increases? He demonstrates that tax cuts for the rich have little positive effect on the economy. Would he agree that, conversely, more taxes on them would have little negative effect?

My inclination is toward prudence, which I am sure is a word that Auerback hates even more than “moderation.” I am old enough to remember the inflation that resulted from the quadrupling of oil prices by OPEC in the late 1970s, the skyrocketing interest rates that the Federal Reserve used to try to quell that inflation, and the economic recession those interest rates caused. Fortunately, the federal debt was then at its lowest point relative to GDP since before the Great Depression. Today the federal debt is slightly higher than the GDP. If that had been the case in 1980, the interest rate burden on the federal budget would have been significantly higher than it was. Does Auerback’s extremism mean increasing the current debt again?

We should not ignore the possibility that external shocks in the future might produce a similar situation. The budgetary dilemma it would create would itself be extreme. Should we cut back on all other federal expenditures to pay the interest on the national debt? That would mean withdrawing the social supports that people depend upon in a recession. Should we borrow more money to pay the interest, increasing the debt burden that is already more than we can bear? Should we default on

“the full faith and credit of the United States”?
HOMER EDWARD PRICE
SYLVA, N.C.

Keynes did not teach us that running a deficit is always OK. He taught us that in a severe depression, when there is (a) monetary hoarding or (b) insufficient investment even at a zero rate of interest, then deficit spending will be needed. Pseudo-Keynesians claim that deficit spending is always needed, period. Thus Keynes’s prescription, valid for the 1930s and the 2008 crisis, is said by expenditure devotees to justify unbalanced spending, always.

Sorry. Check *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money*.

In normal, nondepression times, here’s what happens. The government runs a deficit. It has to borrow. The Fed provides the money to the government, which buys the investment goods or services it wants. This cuts the goods available to the private sector, and prices rise (inflation). People are suckered by the inflation, ending up with a lower real wage. Keep using the trick, and you’ll generate rising inflation, because at each iteration, people anticipate the last inflation rate, so you have to go even higher.

Exactly this happened from 1965 to 1980. Lyndon Johnson financed the Vietnam War on the cheap with deficits. Nobody slammed on the brakes. In 15 years, inflation climbed from 1 percent to 13 percent. At this rate, only a man on horseback could break the inflation. And so we got Cowboy Reagan.

Note the pattern: Massive deficit spending implies surging inflation, which calls forth a nasty rightist to discipline the workers.

AL SHELLY
CIRCLEVILLE, W.V.

Marshall Auerback Replies

In answer to the many questions raised, let me start by saying I would

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VOLUME 310, NUMBER 1,
JANUARY 13/20, 2020

The digital version of this issue is available to all subscribers December 24, 2019, at TheNation.com

Cover photo: AFP via Getty Images / Biju Boro

English Lessons

The UK election result is a staggering and historic defeat for both Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour Party. Not even Neil Kinnock (a Labour leader known in the United States for being plagiarized by Joe Biden) or Michael Foot (whose 1983 Labour manifesto was once described as “the longest suicide

note in history”) managed to lose so badly. The “red wall” of safe Labour seats in Britain’s northern industrial heartland—including Blyth Valley, which had never elected a Tory before, and Tony Blair’s former constituency of Sedgefield, held continuously by Labour since 1935—has crumbled to dust.

Britain will now certainly leave the European Union, probably by the end of January. It is that certainty, more than any other factor, that explains both the fact and the scale of the Conservative triumph and the stunning transformation of Boris Johnson from a bumbling oaf without a mandate who couldn’t get a single bill through Parliament into a prime minister with a majority no other Tory leader has enjoyed since Margaret Thatcher. Johnson bet the House (of Commons) on this election—and won.

On Johnson’s signature project, dragging Britain out of Europe, Corbyn was never close to effective. While Labour fussed and fidgeted over Brexit, promising both to negotiate a new deal with the EU and then to hold another referendum on that deal—in which Corbyn pledged to remain neutral—Johnson and the Conservatives offered clarity and closure. The Tory slogan “Get Brexit done” might lack the pop-psychology punch of “Take back control,” but as a banner for co-opting Nigel Farage’s far-right Brexit Party while rallying the many Brexit-fatigued voters who cared less about the means than about putting an end to the country’s seemingly endless torment, it was pretty close to perfect.

Which isn’t to say that Labour would have done better with an unequivocal Remain stance. None of the Labour defectors who urged their constituents to follow them to the Liberal Democrats kept their seats. Nor did Labour’s dogged attempts to fight the election on its chosen ground of defending the National Health Service and opposing austerity break through. Voters might have liked the party’s new

manifesto, but they didn’t believe it would deliver.

In Britain, that lack of credibility should prompt the painful debate that Corbyn’s surprise election as Labour leader in 2015 cut short on the role of a movement and a party built on the values of the British industrial working class when that class has been globalized, automated, and economically liberalized to near-extinction. Amid the oceans of ink spilled over Corbyn’s failure to adequately address anti-Semitism in the party—a moral question

whose practical electoral impact was negligible—far too little attention was paid to the deep roots of Labour’s dilemma. Once the 2008 financial crisis exposed New Labour’s promise of a booming skills-based economy as the fraud it always was and with mounting inequality rubbing salt into the old wounds, what did the party really have to offer?

Meanwhile, here in the United States, Labour’s defeat prompted a veritable stampede of pundits eager to hammer home the supposed lesson that Corbyn—like Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren—was simply too far left to win. This not only ignores the decisive influence of Brexit but also overlooks the success of the Scottish National Party, whose platform is well to the left of anything on offer by the Democrats.

Yet the British result should sober all of us on the left. The temptation to tell people what’s good for them isn’t just a British disease. Nor the tendency to dismiss workers as hidebound, hopelessly prejudiced, and increasingly irrelevant—or the habit of addressing the electorate you’d like rather than the one you get on Election Day. Like Labour, the Democratic Party has decades of broken promises to overcome. Luckily, progressives here still have a chance to stake out common ground and make a credible, carefully calibrated case. But there isn’t much time.

D.D. GUTTENPLAN FOR *THE NATION*



BY THE NUMBERS
12.5M

Population of Kashmir in 2011

67%

Percentage of Kashmiris who are Muslim

70K

Estimated number of lives lost in the last 30 years of conflict in Kashmir

4K

Number of politicians, activists, and students detained since India revoked Kashmir's special status on August 5

600K

Estimated number of troops in Kashmir

10K

Number of Kashmiris who protested in early August

20

Number of Kashmiri protesters recognized by the Indian government

—Molly Minta



Philo-Anti-Semitism

The rot at the heart of Trump's executive order.

In an alternate universe, the idea of a presidential order designed to protect Jews from discrimination on college campuses would not necessarily create a firestorm of mutual recrimination and internecine political warfare. True, there is no consensus on whether “Jewish” is a religious, cultural, ethnic, or national identity. Most often, it is framed as a combination of at least three, but not always and certainly not in the views of all the various denominations and sects that accept the appellation. But there is no question that anti-Semitic acts are increasing across the United States, and they are being undertaken by people who could not care less about these distinctions. And there is nothing inherently objectionable about using the power of the federal government to try to protect people, including college students, from those incidents’ consequences.

But in this universe, the guy who ordered this protection, Donald Trump, has revealed himself repeatedly to be an inveterate anti-Semite. Just a few days before he issued the executive order, he told supporters of the Israeli-American Council, “You’re brutal killers, not nice people at all.... Some of you don’t like me. Some of you I don’t like at all, actually.” He went on to insist nevertheless that the Jews gathered to hear him were “going to be my biggest supporters,” because Democrats were proposing to raise taxes on the superwealthy. In other words, Jews are greedy and care only about their personal fortunes. Trump, of course, was playing to type. He, his party, and his highest-profile supporters have repeatedly demonized Jews in political advertisements, deploying age-old anti-Semitic tropes that have been used to stir up violence against vulnerable

Jewish communities in Europe and elsewhere. In addition, Trump frequently implies that Jews are not “real” Americans. He tells Jews that Bibi Netanyahu is “your prime minister” and complains that Jewish Democrats—which is most Jews—are “disloyal to Israel.”

That’s on the one hand. On the other, Trump has been a perfect patsy for Israel’s right-wing government and its supporters in what is misnamed the American “pro-Israel” community. While previous presidents sought, without much success, to restrain Israel on behalf of a hoped-for future peace agreement with the Palestinians, Trump has given that nation’s most corrupt and extremist leadership in its 71-year-history carte blanche—peace and the Palestinians be damned.

If the simultaneous embrace of anti-Semitism at home and philo-Semitism when it comes to Israel strikes one as contradictory, this is a mistake. Trump, like so many of today’s elected “populists,” sees considerable advantage in playing to hometown prejudices for personal gain while boosting Israel as a bulwark against worldwide Islam, which many of the president’s supporters consider

an even greater offense to Christian belief than Jews are. Jews may be greedy and disloyal at home, but as long as Israel is out there kicking the shit out of the Arabs, it’s a trade-off that right-wing autocrats and their neofascist followers can get behind.

Most American Jews understandably want no part of this devil’s bargain. They are not interested in having their patriotism questioned. They remain among the most loyal and liberal constituencies in what is left of the decidedly tattered New Deal coalition that Franklin Roosevelt constructed back in the 1930s. And most hold Trump and his alt-right supporters accountable for the atmosphere of menace that has led to horrific attacks on Jews, like the massacre at a Pittsburgh synagogue last year.

But the issue of the executive order is complicated by the fact that it is understood by all to be a means for the federal government to step in and quash the intensifying criticism of Israel on college campuses—most notably, criticism that takes the form of the boycott, divestment, and sanctions movement, or BDS. And it does this in part by insisting, as Jared Kushner recently argued in a *New York Times* op-ed, that all “anti-Zionism is anti-Semitism.”

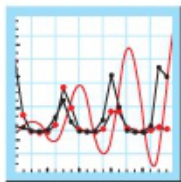
Yet again, the Trump administration has placed a stupid, shiny object before the media.

I’ve been an outspoken critic of the academic BDS movement for some time now. But if you ask me, the movement has been a spectacular failure in every respect, save one: It has succeeded in turning many college campuses into anti-Israel inculcation centers and therefore has scared the bejesus out of the Jewish parents paying for their kids to attend them. At the same time—even if you allow that occasional anti-Semitic comments and actions by some of BDS’s supporters are outliers and not indicative of most of its followers—I find the idea and, even more so, the practice of an academic boycott to be undeniably contradictory to universities’ philosophical commitment to freedom of expression and ideas.

Nonetheless, the explicit and intellectually indefensible equation of anti-Zionism with actionable anti-Semitism is an obvious offense to the notion of freedom of expression, however much it cheers the tiny hearts of right-wing Jews and other Trump defenders. Jewish students already had all the protections they needed before Trump’s executive order. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act covers discrimination on the basis of a “group’s actual or perceived ancestry or ethnic characteristics” or “actual or perceived citizenship or residency in a country whose residents share a dominant religion or a distinct religious identity.”

The New York Times’ early, inaccurate reporting on the executive order, in which the paper falsely stated that the order would “effectively interpret Judaism as a race or nationality,” deserves special mention here for creating the panic. But the result of the entire episode is that, yet again, the Trump administration has placed a stupid, shiny object before the media, and the hysteria that has ensued has divided Americans, Jews, liberals and conservatives, and free speech and human rights activists, all while the administration continues its relentless assault on our democracy and better selves.

ERIC ALTERMAN



THE SCORE/BRYCE COVERT + MIKE KONCZAL

The Free College Try

Nearly all of the Democratic presidential candidates have plans to reduce the exorbitant cost of college. But there's an emerging rift: On one side, candidates like Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders have proposed making public college free for all; on the other, candidates like Pete Buttigieg and Amy Klobuchar want to make it free for only a slice of the population.

The latter worry that by providing free college to everyone who wants it—including, in Buttigieg's words, "the children of millionaires and billionaires"—too many resources will be squandered on the rich.

In reality, we already subsidize college for kids from wealthy families, and those further down the income scale would benefit the

need. And most of that money is going to the wealthiest families. In 2013, for example, families that made \$100,000 or more a year captured more than half of the tuition and fees deduction as well as the exemption for dependent students.

Instead of pouring money into higher education through the tax code, where the rich soak it up, or subsidizing school through loans and grants, the government could make public college free. As Mike Konczal, my colleague here at "The Score," argued in June 2016 in the journal *Democracy*, it would act much like a public option in health care: Private institutions would be forced to compete with free, high-quality public ones and as a result would be incentivized to lower their costs in order to keep attracting students. Predatory for-profit

schools would also face stiffer competition to offer an actual education. "A free, but excellent, option would force private colleges to look harder at what they offer and how much they charge for it," Konczal wrote. Subsidizing student

loans and grants, on the other hand, doesn't give schools an incentive to cut costs. In fact, by covering increases in tuition and fees, it may do the opposite, encouraging colleges and universities to raise their prices.

So what, then, of the charge that creating a free public option would funnel resources to the children of the richest Americans? This argument doesn't hold up under scrutiny. Konczal recently crunched the numbers and found that just 1 percent of students at public institutions hail from the wealthiest 1 percent. This means just 1.4 percent of the total spending it would take to make public college free would benefit these students, leaving the vast majority for the rest of us.

Even if this small group of rich families would benefit from sending their children to a free school—and even if more wealthy families would join them when there is an option without tuition—that doesn't mean they would come out on top financially. Warren and Sanders propose paying for their plans by increasing taxes on the well-off. Rich families would end up paying more than they would get in return, just as a progressive system is supposed to operate.

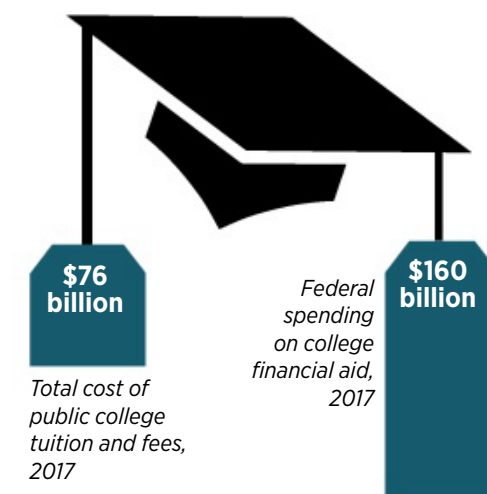
We already offer free education to the children of the rich from kindergarten through 12th grade. A college education should similarly be available to all. Not everyone goes to college or necessarily needs to, as Buttigieg has been pointing out, but that's the point of having a public option. It would offer a choice: Enter the workforce or get a high-quality education, regardless of financial resources.

Bryce Covert

Why Public College Should Be Free

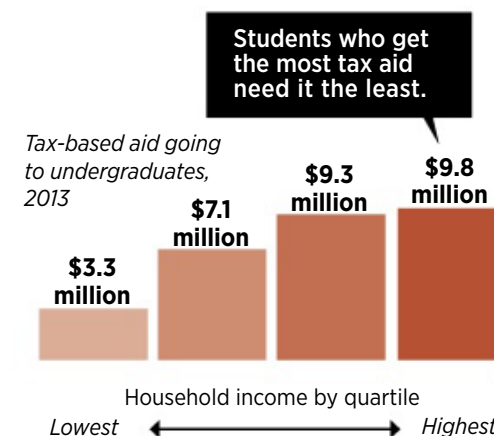
We have the money.

We already spend billions to subsidize higher education.



We just spend it on wealthier students.

Tax breaks are the biggest subsidy, after student loans.



Sources: Department of Education; Congressional Budget Office; Consortium for Higher Education Tax Reform, November 2013.

2019 infographic: Tracy Matsue Loeffelholz

Right now, the government's money is largely flowing to well-off students.

most if public institutions were free.

In 2017, the most recent year for which we have data, all of the tuition and fees charged by public colleges came to \$75.8 billion. That's less than what the federal government spends to subsidize the cost of college. In the same year, the government disbursed about \$160 billion in the form of student loans, grants, and tax breaks to help make higher education less of a burden on American families.

Certainly the students who take advantage of those federal funds use them to go to a variety of higher education institutions, not just public colleges. But it would be more efficient to simply eliminate public college tuition than to spend all that money proping up institutions through a maze of grants and tax breaks.

Right now, the government's money flows largely to well-off students. After student loans, the biggest chunk of student aid is delivered through the tax code; excluding loans, it makes up more than half of all aid. In 2012 the federal government gave \$34 billion in tax breaks, a billion more than it spent on Pell Grants for those in financial

SIGNAL: NOISE

The Grift of Charity

In December, President Donald Trump forked over \$2 million to eight charities. Not because he wanted to but because in November—in a lawsuit brought by New York’s previous attorney general—a judge ruled that he had to pay a penalty for using the Donald J. Trump Foundation as a personal piggy bank.

Even more extraordinary, however, are the broader terms of the court settlement, which

make it clear that the president and his three eldest children—who were all foundation officials—are con artists who

can’t be trusted with other people’s dollars. If Trump ever wants to take part in charity work in New York state again, he will be able to do so only under special supervision. Attorney General Letitia James’s office announced that Donald Trump Jr., Ivanka Trump, and Eric Trump have been put through “compulsory training to ensure this type of illegal activity never takes place again.”

In normal times, a court ruling that the president is a grifter would have gotten rather a lot of attention. But with the US attorney general deliberately misstating the findings of his own inspector general’s report, the president tweeting insults at his own FBI director, yet another Nuremberg-style Trump rally, and so on, the story got largely pushed to one side.

Read the semiweekly column “Signal:Noise” at thenation.com/signal-noise.

—Sasha Abramsky



Katha Pollitt



Holiday Giving Guide

Your tax dollars end up doing a lot of harm. Here’s a way to offset the damage.

Goodbye, 2019! Let’s send the year off with plenty of wassail, latkes, and good cheer and a generous outpouring of year-end donations. Let the gold fly from your purse and pocket! Here are 11 suggestions.

1. Sister District. Progressives will be pouring money and energy into the upcoming presidential primaries, but the 2020 state legislative elections matter, too! Republicans swept up big majorities in 2010, and they now dominate the legislatures in 31 states. That can change—and it had better, because after the 2020 census, the party in control of the legislature determines the electoral map in most states. Sister District focuses on winning legislative races, and it’s pretty good at it, having helped turn both Virginia houses blue. sisterdistrict.com

2. ARC-Southeast. If you want to help a low-income woman who has chosen to end her pregnancy, your best bet is to give directly to abortion funds, which provide financial and logistical support directly to patients. ARC-Southeast (recently profiled in *The New Yorker*) is an Atlanta-based group committed to reproductive justice principles. It currently serves more than 300 patients a month throughout the South, with grants of \$75 to \$100. A first-trimester abortion costs around \$500, so this is a place where your donation could make a real difference. arc-southeast.org

3. Spread the Vote. About half of US citizens are nonvoters—disproportionately low-income, immigrant, and under 50. Spread the Vote works in nine red states to change that through education, registration, turnout efforts, and help obtaining government-issued IDs, which are needed to vote in many states, and may be needed to obtain driver’s licenses, food stamps, and much more. Typical cost of an ID: \$40. spreadthevote.org

4. Kakenya’s Dream. What if you could prevent female genital mutilation and child marriage by providing girls in one of Kenya’s poorest regions with a great education and much-needed social support? When Kakenya Ntaiya became the first girl in her village to go to college in the United States, she vowed to return and help others. The result is a flour-

ishing school for girls, with another under construction. None of the students have undergone genital mutilation, none have been married off, and many have gone on to attend universities. Help share the dream with more Kenyan girls. kakenyadream.org

5. Afghan Women’s Fund. Remember Afghanistan? Our longest war is far from over, and whatever arrangement is reached is sure to empower the Taliban and threaten the fragile gains women have made. Meanwhile, the Afghan Women’s Fund continues to visit insecure and hard-to-reach places to organize schools, hold literacy classes and vocational training for women, and provide medical and school supplies, including computers. Your tax dollars made the war; now donate to peace. Send checks to: Afghan Women’s Fund, 1321 Maple Avenue, Verona, PA 15147. afghanwomensfund.org

6. Florence Immigrant & Refugee Rights Project. The terrible situation at the border with Mexico is perhaps the greatest shame of our country today. The vast majority of immigrants detained there—including, of course, unaccompanied children—have no legal representation. The Florence Project provides legal and social services to detainees in Arizona. In 2018 it served over 10,000 adults and children. Help it do even more in 2020. firrp.org

7. Border Angels. Since 1994, Border Angels estimates that more than 10,000 people have died in the deserts at the southwestern border, many of them from dehydration. Based in San Diego, Border Angels’ volunteers hike into the desert and leave plastic jugs of water along paths known to be used by migrants. It’s so simple and so important. The group also does outreach work with day laborers in the San Diego area and provides material aid to asylum seekers in Central American caravans who are stuck in Tijuana. borderangels.org



*Remember
Afghanistan?
Your tax dollars
made the war;
now donate to
peace through
the Afghan
Women’s Fund.*



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The analysts at Giving What We Can said Cool Earth is “the most cost-effective charity we have identified to date.”

8. Middle East Children’s Alliance. MECA supports community groups in Palestine, Iraq, and Lebanon and provides children with medical aid, school supplies, scholarships, and more. It also builds playgrounds, because even in Gaza—especially in Gaza—kids need to play. And it’s now the US partner of the Edward Said Public Libraries in Gaza, which *Nation* readers have so generously supported. When you give to MECA, you are giving the pleasures of reading in a place where books are hard to come by. mecaforpeace.org

9. Cool Earth. There are many NGOs engaged in fighting climate change, but Cool Earth is, well, pretty cool. This United Kingdom-based group combats rain forest destruction by making agreements with locals not to sell their land to loggers in return for benefits determined by the residents. According to Giving What We Can’s analysis, Cool Earth is “the most cost-effective charity we have identified to date which

works on mitigating climate change through direct action.” coolearth.org

10. Help Lesotho. This small, landlocked African nation has a high rate of extreme poverty and one of the world’s highest rates of HIV. Thanks to the Canadian-based Help Lesotho, for \$495, you can send a child to school. (These are Canadian dollars, so it’s a bargain.) helplesotho.org

11. Paper publications. You know you’ll be sorry when they’re gone! One great magazine is the *Women’s Review of Books*: Feminist powerhouse Jennifer Baumgardner is the new editor, I’m the poetry editor, and it’s full of lively and knowledgeable reviews of popular and scholarly books by writers famous and should-be famous. Plus poems! Through February 14, new subscribers can give a free gift subscription! Make sure to add the gift recipient’s address in the comments field. shop.oldcitypublishing.com/wrb-2-in-20 ■

India’s Fate

In case you wondered why this issue is longer than usual.

Attentive readers may notice something different about this issue of *The Nation*. It’s what we call a jump, meaning that it has more pages than usual. That was the only way we could

accommodate Arundhati Roy’s powerful warning about what’s happening in India.

When we first read the text—originally delivered by Roy at New York’s Cooper Union this year for the Jonathan Schell Memorial Lecture Series on the Fate of the Earth—we were struck by the precision and elegance of her prose and thought what a fitting choice she was for a series named in memory of the longtime *Nation* contributor, who began his journalistic career reporting the truth about America’s disastrous war in Vietnam for *The New Yorker*, went on to issue a devastating anatomy of the planetary peril posed by our numb acceptance of nuclear weapons, and wrote with unmatched clarity (and, sadly, few competitors) about the murderous folly of the Iraq War.

Some readers may think of India as far off. But as Roy vividly establishes, the rise of nationalism and the assaults on minority rights and democratic norms by Narendra Modi’s government both prefigure and mirror developments much closer to home. The impending demise of the world’s largest democracy—the media cliché typically used to describe India—matters to all of us. Indeed, the second time we read Roy’s piece, it was her prophetic force that stayed with us. If the biblical Jeremiah returned as an Indian novelist, this is what he might sound like.

Already the headlines from India underline the dangers of that country’s current course. Oppression is generating protest, which is being met with violence—making Roy’s alarm all the more urgent. Because, with due respect to our colleagues at *The Washington Post*, democracy doesn’t only die in darkness. Sometimes it gets murdered in broad daylight. ■

COMIX NATION

PETER KUPER





THE Nation. TRAVELS

Singular Journeys for Progressives



INDIA: THE WORLD'S LARGEST DEMOCRACY

March 14–28, 2020

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April 24–May 5, 2020

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May 10–18, 2020

SOUTH KOREA: CULTURE AND POLITICS OF THE PENINSULA

May 13–24, 2020

COLOMBIA: LOOKING FORWARD/LOOKING BACK

August 13–24, 2020

THE CHANGING FACES OF RUSSIA

September 5–16, 2020

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GEOPOLITICS

A New Nation?

On December 11, the people of Bougainville, an archipelagic region in the South Pacific, voted overwhelmingly to secede from Papua New Guinea. The vote, with 98 percent in favor, comes almost 20 years after a referendum was promised by the PNG government following the end of a brutal civil war. Although nonbinding, the referendum signals that over the next decade, the world may see the formation of the United Nations' 194th member state.

After Papua New Guinea became independent from Australia in 1975, tensions mounted between the PNG government and Bougainvilleans over the latter's cultural, political, and economic autonomy, embodied in control of the region's Panguna gold mine, the third largest in the world. The conflict escalated into a decade-long war in 1988, leaving an estimated 20,000 people dead. In 2001 leaders from Bougainville and Papua New Guinea signed a peace accord that established the Autonomous Bougainville Government and promised an independence referendum by June 2020.

With the Panguna mine closed and few self-sustaining industries in the region, some worry about the prosperity of a free Bougainville. And since the referendum is nonbinding, the power still lies with the PNG government, with negotiations expected to drag on for years. Even so, Bougainvilleans are ecstatic about the result—to many, a triumph over the colonial and neocolonial conditions imposed over centuries of German, Australian, and Japanese imperial rule.

—Teddy Ostrow



The Death of Human Rights

The United States is throttling what meager enforcement mechanisms still exist.

The most memorable conversations I had this year were with two women, both human rights defenders who have taken refuge in the United States. The first, in self-exile, left Iran 10 years ago; now a US citizen, she advocates against compulsory veiling in the Islamic Republic. The other is younger and recently arrived after a dramatic escape from Pakistan, where she is wanted on trumped-up charges. She is fighting for the United Nations to recognize and protect the human rights of her indigenous group, which has been badly mistreated by the Pakistani state.

Both women are fearless, intrepid, and steadfast, but neither is likely to be successful in her attempts to use the machinery of international human rights. This is not due to any shortcomings in the women themselves or any lack in the nobility of their causes. The state should not force women to dress in one way or another, nor should avaricious governments ignore the rights of indigenous peoples.

The reason for their almost certain failure is that the legal edifice of human rights, in relying on state compliance, has crumbled. What began with the 1948 ratification of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, initially an unenforceable document that laid out the bare minimum of what every human was owed, grew in the 1970s through the '90s into a system of treaties and laws that allowed lawyers to file suit against countries that were committing violations. As Yale scholar Samuel Moyn has pointed out, the human rights regime that resulted was the West's attempt to hold up an ideal of what world order should be.

The two decades of this millennium have only seen a weakening of this system. The UN Security Council, one of the primary venues for sanctioning states that commit human rights violations, has long had problems with some of the members that have veto power. Russia and China, the latter currently implicated in the internment of more than 1 million Uighur Muslims, have been obstacles to achieving consensus that would permit international action. In recent years, these illiberal nations have been joined by the United States, which also seems uninterested in upholding any international standard of human rights. In November the Security Council watched, appalled,

as the United States announced that it would no longer consider Israeli settlements in the West Bank a violation of international law.

Refusing to follow Security Council resolutions is not the only way the United States is throttling what meager enforcement mechanisms exist for human rights. This year Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced the formation of the Commission on Unalienable Rights, composed of legal and religious scholars. Its job is to consider what human rights are also natural rights, or rights conferred by nature or God. This is a turning away from the secular foundation of the existing international human rights regime, replacing it with whatever individual governments decide they think count as human rights.

There are other consequences to the US uninterest. Currently, the United States is the largest contributor to the United Nations, but a document released by the Congressional Research Service revealed that the Trump administration is seeking

budget cuts in 2020 that would decrease UN peacekeeping funding by 27 percent and regular funding by 25 percent. Significant among these are targeted reductions to UN women's programs that involve reproductive health, which a secular consensus on rights had found unproblematic but a natural rights perspective flowing from evangelical Christianity does not.

Nor is the United States the only one to spurn the Security Council and the idea that rights are granted by government agreement rather than divine fiat. In a recent speech Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who has presided over a crackdown on dissenters, writers, and university professors, tried persuading Muslim countries to stop trusting the United Nations. "We need to first believe in ourselves. As the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, we need to recognize our power, comprehend ourselves, and determine our attitude accordingly.



Cooperation between social media companies and repressive states means that governments can suppress information.

The UN, which failed to find solutions in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Rwanda, and Syria, will not find solutions to our problems.”

Beyond the United Nations, the advocacy mechanisms that enable global human rights networks to deploy naming and shaming as a way to hold states to account are broken. The advent of social media initially led to victories for human rights defenders, who were able to use Facebook and Twitter to organize demonstrations and get crucial information out from repressive nations. But in recent years, cooperation between social media companies and these very same states has meant that governments can suppress information and punish dissenters. In addition, governments in places like the Philippines and Russia have used armies of online trolls to shut down protest.

In 2018, the United Nations announced an update

to its investigation of the genocide of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar. At least one UN official leading the fact-finding mission said that Facebook played a “determining role” in fanning the ethnic hatreds that have led to massacres and pogroms and the displacement of over 600,000 Rohingya Muslims. In other cases, the spread of misinformation online has ensured that governments undertaking atrocities can say that the reports are false or made up.

All of this portends the end of an era. With the substance of the human rights consensus eviscerated, the women I met this year will have nothing to appeal to but an empty shell, a husk no longer supported by international agreement. Theirs will be a sad, even tragic ritual, a reminder that such actions once held meaning but are now hollow and ineffectual—an homage to an age that is now over. ■

The spread of misinformation online has ensured that governments undertaking atrocities can say that the reports are made up.

SNAPSHOT / CRISTINA QUICLER

Climate Shortfall

Indigenous Brazilians rally to demand climate justice outside the COP25 summit in Madrid on December 9, which commenced with a warning from the UN about the “utterly inadequate” efforts of the world’s major economies to curb carbon pollution. The summit has been universally panned for failing to make progress.

Calvin Trillin
Deadline Poet

THE LOW POINT?

President Trump on Thursday found time to insult 16-year-old Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg after she was named *Time*’s Person of the Year, an honor he has coveted for years. —*The Washington Post*

And yet we’re probably due for worse.
He hasn’t reached his nadir fully.
The bully pulpit’s sad descent
Now means we’re left with just the bully.





Saffron power:
Female members
of the right-wing
Hindu nationalist RSS
movement.



INDIA

Portents of an Ending

Modi, the RSS, and the rise of the Hindu far right.

ARUNDHATI ROY

W

HILE PROTEST REVERBERATES ON THE STREETS OF CHILE, CATALONIA, BOLIVIA, France, Iraq, Lebanon, and Hong Kong and a new generation rages against what has been done to the planet, I hope you will forgive me for speaking about a place where the streets have been taken over by something quite different. There was a time when dissent was India's best export. But now, even as protest swells in the West, our great anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist movements for social and environmental justice—the marches against big dams, against the privatization and plunder of our rivers and forests, against mass displacement and the alienation of indigenous people's homelands—have largely fallen silent.

In India today, a shadow world is creeping up on us in broad daylight. It is becoming more and more difficult to communicate the scale of the crisis even to ourselves. An accurate description runs the risk of sounding like hyperbole. And so, for the sake of credibility and good manners, we groom the creature that has sunk its teeth into us; we comb out its hair and wipe its dripping jaw to make it more personable in polite company. India isn't by any means the worst or most dangerous place in the world—at least not yet—but perhaps the divergence between what it could have been and what it has become makes it the most tragic.

Right now, 7 million people in the valley of Kashmir, overwhelming numbers of whom do not wish to be citizens of India and have fought for decades for their right to self-determination, are locked down under a digital siege and the densest military occupation in the world. Simultaneously, in the eastern state of Assam, almost 2 million people who long to belong to India have found their names missing from the National Register of Citizens and risk being declared stateless. The Indian government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi has announced its intention of extending the NRC to the rest of India.

The violence of inclusion and the violence of exclusion are precursors to a convulsion that could alter the foundations of India and rearrange its meaning and its place in the world. Our Constitution calls India a “socialist secular democratic republic.” For us, the word “secular” is code for a society in which all religions have equal standing in the eyes of the law. In practice, India has been neither secular nor socialist. It has always functioned as an upper-caste Hindu state. But the conceit of secularism, hypocritical though it may be, is the only shard of coherence that makes India possible. That hypocrisy was the best thing we had. Without it, India will end.

In his May 2019 victory speech after the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won a second term, Modi boasted that no politicians from any political party had dared to campaign on “secularism.” The tank of secularism, Modi seemed to say, was now empty. So it's official: India is running on empty. And we are learning, too late, to cherish hypocrisy. Because with it comes a vestige, a pretense at least, of remembered decency.

India is not really a country. It is a continent. More complex and diverse, with more languages—780 at last

count, excluding dialects—more indigenous tribes and religions, and perhaps more communities that consider themselves separate nations than all of Europe. Imagine this vast ocean, this fragile, fractious, social ecosystem, suddenly being commandeered by a Hindu supremacist organization that believes in a doctrine of one nation, one language, one religion, one Constitution.

I am speaking here of the RSS, the Rashtriya Swayam-sevak Sangh, founded in 1925—the mother ship of the ruling BJP. Its founding fathers were greatly influenced by German and Italian fascism. They likened the Muslims of India to the Jews of Germany and believed that Muslims had no place in Hindu India. The RSS today, in typical RSS chameleon-speak, distances itself from this view. But its underlying ideology, in which Muslims are cast as permanent, treacherous outsiders, is a constant refrain in the public speeches of BJP politicians and finds utterance in chilling slogans raised by rampaging mobs. For example, *Mussalman ka ek hi sthan—Kabristan ya Pakistan*. (Only one place for the Muslim—the graveyard or Pakistan.) In October 2019, Mohan Bhagwat, the supreme leader of the RSS, said, “India is a Hindu *rashtra*”—a Hindu nation. “This is nonnegotiable.”

That idea turns everything that is beautiful about India into acid.

In practice, India has never been secular or socialist. It has always functioned as an upper-caste Hindu state.

Arundhati Roy is the author of the novels The God of Small Things, for which she received the 1997 Booker Prize, and The Ministry of Utmost Happiness. This essay is adapted from her address for the Jonathan Schell Memorial Lecture Series on the Fate of the Earth, created by Type Media Center and the Gould Family Foundation and presented by Cooper Union.

IF NAZI GERMANY WAS A COUNTRY SEEKING TO IMPOSE its imagination onto a continent (and beyond), the impetus of an RSS-ruled India is, in a sense, the opposite. Here is a continent seeking to shrink itself into a country. Not even a country but a province—a primitive, ethnoreligious province. This is turning out to be an unimaginably violent process.

None of the white supremacist, neo-Nazi groups on the rise in the world today can boast the infrastructure and manpower that the RSS commands. It says it has 57,000 *shakhas*—branches—across the country and an armed, dedicated militia of over 600,000 “volunteers.” It runs schools in which millions of students are enrolled and has its own medical missions, trade unions, farmers’ organizations, media outlets, and women’s groups. Recently, it announced that it was opening a training school for those who wish to join the Indian Army. Under its *bhagwa dhwaj*, its saffron pennant, a whole host of far-right organizations, known as the Sangh Parivar—the RSS’s “family”—have prospered and multiplied. These organizations, the political equivalent of shell companies, are responsible for shockingly violent attacks on minorities in which, over the years, uncounted thousands have been murdered.

Modi has been a member of the RSS since he was 8 years old. He is a creation of the RSS. Although not Brahmin, he, more than anyone else in its history, has been responsible for turning the RSS into the most powerful organization in India. It is exasperating to have to constantly repeat the story of Modi’s ascent to power, but the officially sanctioned amnesia around it makes reiteration almost a duty.

Modi’s political career was jump-started in October 2001, just weeks after the 9/11 attacks in the United States, when the BJP removed its elected chief minister in the state of Gujarat and installed Modi in his place. Five months into his first term, there was a heinous but mysterious act of arson in which 59 Hindu pilgrims were burned to death in a train. As revenge, Hindu vigilante mobs went on a well-planned rampage across the state. An estimated 2,500 people, almost all of them Muslim, were murdered in broad daylight. Women were gang-raped on city streets, and nearly 150,000 people were driven from their homes. Immediately after the pogrom, Modi called for elections. He won, not despite the massacre but because of it—and was reelected as chief minister for three consecutive terms. During his first campaign as the BJP’s prime-ministerial candidate—which also featured the massacre of Muslims, this time in the district of Muzaffarnagar in the state of Uttar Pradesh—a Reuters journalist asked him whether he regretted the 2002 pogrom in Gujarat. Modi replied that he would regret even the death of a dog if it accidentally came under the wheels of his car. This was pure, well-trained RSS-speak.

When Modi was sworn in as India’s 14th prime minister, he was celebrated not just by his base of Hindu nationalists but also by India’s major industrialists and businessmen, by

many Indian liberals, and by the international media as the epitome of hope and progress, a savior in a saffron business suit whose very person represented the confluence of the ancient and the modern—of Hindu nationalism and no-holds-barred free-market capitalism.

While Modi has delivered on Hindu nationalism, he has stumbled badly on the free-market front. Through a series of blunders, he has brought India’s economy to its knees. In 2016, about two years into his first term, he announced on television that, from that moment on, all 500 and 1,000 rupee banknotes—over 80 percent of the currency in circulation—had ceased to be legal tender. Nothing like it had ever been done on such a scale in the history of any country. Neither the finance minister nor the chief economic adviser seemed to have been taken into Modi’s confidence. “Demonetization,” the prime minister said, was a “surgical strike” on corruption and terrorism funding. This was pure quack economics, a home remedy being tried on a nation of more than 1 billion people. It turned out to be nothing short of devastating.

But there were no riots. No protests. People stood meekly in line outside banks for hours on end to deposit their old currency notes—the only way left to redeem them. No Chile, Catalonia, Lebanon, Hong Kong. Almost overnight, jobs disappeared, the construction industry ground to a halt, and small businesses simply shut down.

Some of us foolishly believed that this act of unimaginable hubris would be the end of Modi. How wrong we

were. People suffered—but rejoiced. It was as though pain had been spun into pleasure. As though their suffering was the labor that would soon birth a glorious, prosperous, Hindu India.

Most economists agree that demonetization—along with the new goods and services tax that Modi announced last year, promising “one nation, one tax”—was the policy equivalent of shooting out the tires of a speeding car. Even the government’s own data shows that unemployment is at a 45-year high. The 2019 Global Hunger Index ranks India 102nd out of 117 countries. (Nepal comes in at 73rd, Bangladesh 88th, and Pakistan 94th.)

But demonetization was never about economics alone. It was a loyalty test, a love exam that the Great Leader was putting us through. Would we follow him? Would we always love him, no matter what? We emerged with flying colors. The moment we as a people accepted demonetization, we infantilized ourselves and surrendered to tin-pot authoritarianism.

But what was bad for the country turned out to be excellent for the BJP. From 2016 to 2017, even as the economy tanked, it became one of the richest political parties in the world. Its income increased by 81 percent, making it nearly five times as rich as its main rival, the Congress Party, whose income declined by 14 percent. Smaller political parties were virtually bankrupted. This war chest won the BJP crucial state elections in Uttar Pradesh and turned the 2019 general election into a

**Demonetization
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Great Leader.**



Howdy, Modi!
In September, Donald Trump and Narendra Modi took a victory lap together at the NRG Stadium in Houston.

race between a Ferrari and a few old bicycles. And since elections are increasingly about money, the chances of a free and fair election in the near future seem remote. So maybe demonetization was not a blunder after all.

DURING MODI'S SECOND TERM, THE RSS HAS stepped up its game. No longer a shadow state or a parallel state, it is the state. Day by day, we see examples of its control over the media, the police, the intelligence agencies. Worryingly, it appears to exercise considerable influence over the armed forces, too. Foreign diplomats and ambassadors have been hobnobbing with Mohan Bhagwat. The German ambassador even trooped all the way to the RSS headquarters in Nagpur to pay his respects.

In truth, things have reached a stage where overt control is no longer even necessary. More than 400 round-the-clock television news channels and millions of WhatsApp groups and TikTok videos keep the population on a drip feed of frenzied bigotry.

This November the Supreme Court of India ruled on what a judge called one of the most important cases in the world. On December 6, 1992, in the town of Ayodhya, a Hindu vigilante mob organized by the BJP and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad—the World Hindu Council—hammered a 460-year-old mosque into dust. They claimed this mosque, the Babri Masjid, was built on the ruins of a Hindu temple that had marked the birthplace

of Lord Ram. More than 2,000 people, mostly Muslims, were killed in the communal violence that followed. In its recent judgment, the Supreme Court held that Muslims could not prove their exclusive and continuous possession of the site. Instead it turned the site over to a trust—to be constituted by the BJP government—tasked with building a Hindu temple on it. There have been mass arrests of people who have criticized the judgment. The VHP has refused to back down on its past statements that it will turn its attention to other mosques. This can be an endless campaign. After all, everything is built over something.

TO CONSOLIDATE THEIR POLITICAL GAINS, THE RSS and BJP have developed a strategy to generate long-lasting chaos on an industrial scale. They have stocked their kitchen with a set of simmering cauldrons that can, whenever necessary, be quickly brought to a boil.

On August 5, 2019, the Indian government unilaterally breached the fundamental conditions of the Instrument of Accession by which the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir agreed to become part of India in 1947. Parliament stripped Jammu and Kashmir of statehood and its special status, which included the right to have its own constitution and flag. The dissolution of the state as a legal entity also meant the dissolution of Section 35A of the Indian Constitution, which secured its erstwhile citizens the rights and privileges that

During Modi's second term, the RSS has stepped up its game. No longer a parallel state or shadow state, it now is the state.



Kashmir in the streets: Activists of the Youth Forum for Kashmir protest India's decree stripping the region of its autonomy.

made them stewards of their territory. In preparation for the move, the government flew in more than 80,000 troops to supplement the hundreds of thousands already stationed there. By the night of August 4, tourists and pilgrims had been evacuated from the Kashmir Valley. Schools and markets were shut down. By midnight, the Internet was cut, and phones went dead. In the weeks that followed, more than 4,000 people were arrested—politicians, businessmen, lawyers, rights activists, local leaders, students, and three former chief ministers. Kashmir's entire political class, including people who have been loyal to India, was incarcerated.

The abrogation of Kashmir's special status, the promise of an all-India National Register of Citizens, and the building of the Ram temple in Ayodhya are all on the front burners of the RSS and BJP kitchen. To reignite flagging passions, all they need to do is to pick a villain from their gallery and unleash the dogs of war. There are several categories of villains: Pakistani jihadis, Kashmiri terrorists, Bangladeshi "infiltrators," or anyone in a population of nearly 200 million Indian Muslims who can always be accused of being Pakistan lovers or anti-national traitors. Each of these "cards" becomes a hostage to the others—and is often made to stand in for them. Yet they have little to do with one another and are often inimical, because their needs, desires, ideologies, and situations end up posing an existential threat to the rest. Simply because they are all Muslim, each group has to suffer the consequences of the others' actions.

In two national elections now, the BJP has shown that it can win a majority in Parliament without the Muslim vote. As a result, Indian Muslims have been effectively

disenfranchised and are becoming that most vulnerable of people, a community without political representation, without a voice. Various forms of vicious social boycotts are pushing them down the economic ladder and, for reasons of physical security, into ghettos. Indian Muslims have also lost their place in the mainstream media. The only Muslim voices we hear on television shows are the absurd few who are constantly and deliberately invited to play the part of the primitive Islamist, to make things worse than they already are. Other than that, the only acceptable public speech for the Muslim community is to constantly reiterate and demonstrate its loyalty to the Indian flag. So while Kashmiris, brutalized as they are because of their history and, more important, their geography, still have a lifeboat—the dream of *azadi*, of freedom—Indian Muslims have to stay on deck to help fix the broken ship.

The lynching of Tabrez Ansari illustrates just how broken that ship is, how deep the rot. Lynching, as you in the United States well know, is a public performance of ritualized murder, in which a person is killed to remind his or her community that it lives at the mercy of the mob. And that the police, the law, the government—as well as the good people in their homes, who wouldn't hurt a fly, who go to work and take care of their families—are all

The BJP has shown it can win a majority without the Muslim vote. As a result, Indian Muslims have been effectively disenfranchised.

friends of the mob. Ansari was lynched this June. He was an orphan, raised by his uncles in the state of Jharkhand. As a teenager, he went away to the city of Pune, where he found a job as a welder. When he turned 22, he returned home to get married. Soon after his wedding to 18-year-old Shahista, Ansari was caught by a mob, tied to a lamppost, beaten for hours, and forced to chant the new Hindu war cry, “*Jai Shri Ram!*” (Victory to Lord Ram!) The police eventually took him into custody but refused to allow his distraught family and young bride to take him to the hospital. Instead they accused him of being a thief and produced him before a magistrate, who sent him back to custody. Ansari died there four days later.

In its latest report, released in October, the National Crime Records Bureau carefully left out data on mob lynchings. According to the Indian news site *The Quint*, there have been 113 deaths by mob violence since 2015. Lynchers and others accused in hate crimes, including mass murder, have been rewarded with public office and honored by ministers in Modi’s cabinet. Modi himself, usually garrulous on Twitter, generous with condolences and birthday greetings, goes very quiet each time a person is lynched. Perhaps it’s unreasonable to expect a prime minister to comment every time a dog comes under the wheels of someone’s car. Particularly since it happens so often.

HERE IN THE UNITED STATES, 50,000 INDIAN Americans gathered in Houston’s NRG Stadium on September 22, 2019, for the “Howdy, Modi!” extravaganza, which has already become the stuff of legend. President Donald Trump was gracious enough to allow a visiting prime minister to introduce him as a special guest in his own country, to his own citizens. Several members of the US Congress spoke, their smiles too wide, their bodies arranged in attitudes of ingratiation. Over a crescendo of drumrolls and wild cheering, the adoring crowd chanted, “Modi! Modi! Modi!” At the end of the show, Trump and Modi linked hands and took a victory lap. The stadium exploded. In India the noise was amplified a thousand times over by carpet coverage on television channels. “Howdy” became a Hindi word. Meanwhile, news organizations ignored the thousands of people protesting outside the stadium.

Not all the roaring of the 50,000 in that Houston stadium could mask the deafening silence from Kashmir. That day marked the 48th day of the curfew and communication blockade in the valley.

Once again, Modi has managed to unleash his unique brand of cruelty on a scale unheard of in modern times. And once again, it has endeared him further to his loyal public. When the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganization Bill was passed in Parliament on August 6, there were celebrations across the political spectrum. Sweets were distributed in offices, and there was dancing in the streets. A conquest—a colonial annexation, another triumph for the Hindu nation—was being celebrated. Once again, the conquerors’ eyes fell on the two primeval trophies of conquest: women and land. Statements

by senior BJP politicians and patriotic pop music videos that notched millions of views legitimized this indecency. Google Trends showed a surge in searches for the phrases “marry a Kashmiri girl” and “buy land in Kashmir.” In the weeks after the siege, the Forest Advisory Committee approved 125 projects that involve the diversion of forest land for other uses.

In the early days of the lockdown, little news came out of the valley. The Indian media told us what the government wanted us to hear. The heavily censored Kashmiri papers carried pages and pages of news about canceled weddings, the effects of climate change, the conservation of lakes and wildlife sanctuaries, tips on living with diabetes, and front-page government advertisements about the benefits that Kashmir’s new downgraded legal status would bring to the Kashmiri people. Those “benefits” are likely to include projects that control and commandeer water from the rivers that flow through Kashmir. They will certainly include the erosion that results from deforestation, the destruction of the fragile Himalayan ecosystem, and the plunder of Kashmir’s bountiful natural wealth by Indian corporations.

Real reporting came mostly from journalists and photographers working for the international media: Agence France-Presse, the Associated Press, Al Jazeera, *The Guardian*, the BBC, *The New York Times*, and *The Washington Post*. The reporters—mostly Kashmiris working in an information vacuum, with none of the tools usually available to modern-day reporters—traveled through their homeland at great risk to bring us the news. And the news was of nighttime raids, of young men being rounded up and beaten for hours, their screams broadcast on public-address systems for their neighbors and families to hear, of soldiers entering villagers’ homes and mixing fertilizer and kerosene into their winter food stocks. The news was of teenagers with bodies peppered by shotgun pellets being treated at home because they would be arrested if they went to a hospital. The news was of hundreds of children being whisked away in the dead of night, of parents debilitated by desperation and anxiety. The news was of fear, anger, depression, confusion, steely resolve, and incandescent resistance.

But the home minister, Amit Shah, said the siege existed only in people’s imaginations; the governor of Jammu and Kashmir, Satya Pal Malik, asserted phone lines were not important for Kashmiris and were used only by terrorists; and the army chief, Bipin Rawat, insisted, “Normal life in Jammu and Kashmir has not been affected. People are doing their necessary work.... Those who feel that life has been affected are the ones whose survival depends on terrorism.” It isn’t hard to work out whom exactly the government of India sees as terrorists.

Soon after his wedding, Tabrez Ansari was caught by a mob, tied to a lamppost, and beaten for hours. He died four days later.

IMAGINE IF ALL OF NEW YORK CITY WERE PUT UNDER AN information lockdown and a curfew managed by hundreds of thousands of soldiers. Imagine the streets of the city remapped by razor wire and torture centers. Imagine if mini Abu Ghraib appeared in your neighborhoods. Imagine thousands of you being arrested and your families not knowing where you have been taken. Imagine not being able to communicate with anybody—not your neighbors, not your loved ones outside the city, not a single person in the outside world—for weeks. Imagine banks and schools being closed, children locked in their homes. Imagine your parent, sibling, partner, or child dying and you not knowing about it for weeks. Imagine the medical emergencies, the mental-health emergencies, the legal emergencies, the shortages of food, money, gasoline. Imagine being a day laborer or a contract worker earning nothing for weeks

on end. And then imagine being told that all of this was for your own good.

The horror that Kashmiris have endured for months comes on top of the trauma of a 30-year armed conflict that has taken 70,000 lives and covered their valley with graves. They have held out while everything was

thrown at them—war, torture, disappearances, an army of more than half a million soldiers, and a smear campaign in which an entire population has been portrayed as murderous fundamentalists.

The siege has lasted for about five months. Kashmiri leaders are still in jail. They were offered release under the condition of agreeing not to make public statements about Kashmir for a whole year. Most have refused.

Of late the curfew has been eased, schools have been reopened, and some phone lines have been restored. Normalcy has been declared. In Kashmir, normalcy is always a declaration, a fiat issued by the government or the army. It has little to do with people's daily lives.

So far, Kashmiris have refused to accept this new normal. Classrooms are empty, the streets are deserted, and the valley's bumper apple crop is rotting in the orchards. What could be harder for a parent or a farmer to endure? The imminent annihilation of their very identity, perhaps.

The new phase of the Kashmir conflict has already begun. Militants have warned that, from now on, all Indians will be considered legitimate targets. More than 10 people, mostly poor, non-Kashmiri migrant workers, have been killed. (Yes, it's the poor, almost always the poor, who get caught in the line of fire.) It is going to get ugly. Very ugly.

Soon all this recent history will be forgotten, and once again there will be debates in television studios that create a false equivalence between atrocities by Indian security forces and Kashmiri militants. Speak of Kashmir, and the Indian government and its media will

immediately tell you about Pakistan, deliberately conflating the misdeeds of a hostile foreign state with the democratic aspirations of ordinary people living under a military occupation. It is clear the only option the Indian government will allow Kashmiris is complete capitulation, that no form of resistance is acceptable—violent or nonviolent, spoken, written, or sung. Yet Kashmiris know that to exist, they must resist.

Why should they want to be a part of India? For what earthly reason? If freedom is what they want, freedom is what they should have.

It's what Indians should want, too. Not on behalf of Kashmiris but for their own sake. The atrocities being committed in their name involve a form of corrosion that India will not survive. Kashmir may not defeat India, but it will consume India. In many ways, it already has.

THIS MAY NOT HAVE MATTERED ALL THAT much to the 50,000 people cheering in that Houston stadium, living out the ultimate Indian dream of having made it to America.

For them, Kashmir may be just a tired old conundrum for which they foolishly believe the BJP has found a lasting solution. Surely, however, as migrants themselves, their understanding of what is happening in Assam could be more nuanced. Or maybe it's too much to ask of those who, in a world riven by refugee and migrant crises, are the most fortunate of migrants. Many of those in the stadium, like people with an extra holiday home, probably hold US citizenship as well as Overseas Citizens of India certificates. Because the "Howdy, Modi!" event also marked the 22nd day since almost 2 million people in Assam found their names missing from the National Register of Citizens.

Like Kashmir, Assam is a border state with a history of multiple sovereignties, with centuries of migration, wars, invasion, continually shifting borders, British colonialism, and more than 70 years of electoral democracy that have only deepened the fault lines in a dangerously combustible society. Assam was among the territories ceded to the British after the First Anglo-Burmese War in 1826. At the time, it was a densely forested province, home to hundreds of communities—among them Bodo, Cachari, Mishing, Lalung, Ahomiya Hindus, and Ahomiya Muslims—each with its own language or speech practice, each with an organic (though often undocumented) relationship to the land. Like a microcosm of India, Assam has always been a collection of minorities jockeying to make alliances in order to manufacture a majority, ethnic as well as linguistic. Anything that altered or threatened the prevailing balance became a potential catalyst for violence.

The seeds for just such an alteration were sown in 1837, when the British, the new masters of Assam, made Bengali the official language of the province. It meant that almost all administrative and government jobs were taken by an educated, Bengali-speaking Hindu elite. Although the policy was reversed in the early 1870s and Assamese given official status along with Bengali, it shifted the balance of power in serious ways and marked the be-

**In Kashmir
"normalcy" is
a declaration,
a fiat from the
government. It has
little to do with
people's daily lives.**



Occupation by documentation:
In Chirang in Assam, a woman waits with her child to see if their papers are in order.

ginning of what has become an almost two-century-old antagonism between speakers of Assamese and Bengali.

Toward the middle of the 19th century, the British discovered that the climate and soil of the region were conducive to tea cultivation. Local people were unwilling to work as serfs in the tea gardens, so a large population of indigenous tribespeople was transported from central India. They were no different from the shiploads of indentured Indian laborers the British transported to their colonies all over the world. Today plantation workers in Assam make up 15 to 20 percent of the state's population. Shamefully, these workers are looked down upon by the local people and continue to live on the plantations, at the mercy of plantation owners and earning slave wages.

By the late 1890s, as the tea industry grew, the British encouraged Bengali Muslim peasants—masters of the art of farming on the rich, silty, riverine plains and shifting islands of the Brahmaputra, known as *chars*—to migrate to Assam. To the British, the forests and plains of Assam were, if not *terra nullius*, then *terra almost nullius*. They hardly registered the presence of Assam's many tribes and blithely allocated what were tribal commons to "productive" peasants whose produce would contribute to British revenue collection. By 1930, migration had drastically changed both the economy and the demography of Assam.

At first, the migrants were welcomed by Assamese nationalist groups, but soon tensions arose—ethnic, religious, and linguistic. They were temporarily mitigated when, in the 1941 census and then more emphatically in 1951 census and every census that followed, as a gesture of solidarity with their new homeland, the entire popula-

tion of Bengali-speaking Muslims—whose local dialects are together known as the Miya language—designated Assamese as their mother tongue, thereby ensuring that it retained the status of an official language. Even today, Miya dialects are written in the Assamese script.

Over the years, the borders of Assam were redrawn continually, almost dizzyingly. When the British partitioned Bengal in 1905, they attached Assam to Muslim-majority East Bengal, with Dhaka as its capital. Suddenly, what had been a migrant population in Assam was no longer migrant but part of a majority. Six years later, when Bengal was reunified and Assam became a province of its own, its Bengali population became migrants once again. After the 1947 Partition, when East Bengal became a part of Pakistan, the Bengal-origin Muslim settlers in Assam chose to stay on. But Partition also led to a massive influx of Bengali refugees into Assam, Hindus as well as Muslims. And in 1971 there was yet another influx of refugees, fleeing the Pakistani Army's genocidal attack on East Pakistan and the liberation war that birthed the nation of Bangladesh, which together took millions of lives.

So Assam was part of East Bengal, and then it wasn't. East Bengal became East Pakistan, and East Pakistan became Bangladesh. Countries changed, flags changed, anthems changed. Cities grew, forests were felled, marshes

Locals were unwilling to work as serfs in the tea gardens, so indigenous people were transported from central India.

Rank and file:
Over 200,000
RSS volunteers
from Uttarakhand
and Uttar Pradesh
gather in Meerut in
February 2018.



were reclaimed, tribal commons were swallowed by modern development. And the fissures between people grew old and hard and intractable.

The demand for a National Register of Citizens in Assam arose out of this unique, vexed, and complex history. Ironically, the word “national” here refers not so much to India as it does to the nation of Assam. The demand to update the first NRC, conducted in 1951, grew out of a student-led Assamese nationalist movement that peaked between 1979 and 1985, alongside a militant separatist movement in which tens of thousands of people lost their lives. The Assamese nationalists called for a boycott of elections unless “foreigners” were deleted

**Assam was part of
East Bengal, and
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from the election rolls; the clarion call was for “3D,” which stood for “Detect, delete, deport.” The number of so-called foreigners was estimated to be in the millions. Killings, arson, bombings, and mass demonstrations generated an atmosphere of hostility and almost uncontrollable

rage toward “outsiders.” By 1979, the state was up in flames. Though the movement was primarily directed against Bengalis and Bengali speakers, Hindu communal forces within the movement also gave it an anti-Muslim character. In 1983 this culminated in the horrifying Nalbari massacre, in which more than 2,000 Bengal-origin Muslim settlers were murdered over six hours.

In *What the Fields Remember*, a documentary about the massacre, an elderly Muslim who lost all his children to the violence tells of how one of his daughters, not long before the massacre, had been part of a march asking for “foreigners” to be expelled. Her dying words, he said, were “Baba, are we also foreigners?”

IN 1985, THE STUDENT LEADERS OF THE ASSAM AGITATION signed the Assam Accord with the central government. That year, they won the state’s assembly elections and formed the state government. A date was agreed upon: Those who had arrived in Assam after midnight of March 24, 1971—the day the Pakistani Army began its attack on civilians in East Pakistan—would be expelled. The updating of the NRC was meant to sift the “genuine citizens” of Assam from the post-1971 “infiltrators.”

Over the next several years, “infiltrators” detected by the border police and those declared “doubtful voters,” or D-voters, by election officials were tried under the Illegal Migrants Determination by Tribunal Act, which was passed in 1983 by a Congress Party government under Indira Gandhi. In order to protect minorities from harassment, the IMDT Act put the onus of disproving a person’s citizenship on the police or accusing party. Since 1997, more than 400,000 D-voters and “declared foreigners” have been referred to Foreigners Tribunals. Over 1,000 are still locked up in detention centers, jails within jails where detainees don’t have the rights that even ordinary criminals do.

In 2005 the Supreme Court adjudicated a case that asked for the IMDT Act to be struck down on the

grounds that it made the “detection and deportation of illegal immigrants nearly impossible.” In its judgment annulling the act, the court noted, “There can be no manner of doubt that the State of Assam is facing ‘external aggression and internal disturbance’ on account of large scale illegal migration of Bangladeshi nationals.” Now it put the onus of proving citizenship on the citizen. This completely changed the paradigm and set the stage for the new, updated NRC. The case was filed by Sarbananda Sonowal, a former president of the All Assam Students’ Union who is now a member of the BJP and currently serves as the chief minister of Assam.

In 2013 the Supreme Court took up a case filed by an NGO called Assam Public Works that asked for illegal migrants’ names to be struck from the election rolls. Eventually, the case was assigned to the court of Justice Ranjan Gogoi, who happens to be Assamese.

In December 2014, the Supreme Court ordered that an updated list for the NRC be produced within a year. Millions of villagers living in far-flung areas were expected to produce a specified set of documents—“legacy papers”—which proved a direct and unbroken paternal lineage dating back to before 1971. The Supreme Court’s deadline turned the exercise into a nightmare. Impoverished, illiterate villagers were delivered into a labyrinth of bureaucracy, legalese, documentation, court hearings, and all the ruthless skulduggery that goes with them.

The only way to reach the remote, seminomadic settlements on the *chars*—shifting, silty islands—of the Brahmaputra is by often perilously overcrowded boats. The island settlements are temporary, and the dwellings are just shacks. Yet some of the islands are so fertile and the farmers on them so skilled that they raise three crops a year. Their impermanence, however, has meant the absence of land deeds, of development, of schools and hospitals.

In the less fertile *chars* that I visited in early October, the poverty washes over you like the dark, silt-rich waters of the Brahmaputra. The only signs of modernity were the bright plastic bags containing documents that their owners—who quickly gather around visiting strangers—cannot read but kept looking at anxiously, as though trying to decrypt the shapes on the faded pages and work out whether they would save them and their children from the massive new detention camp they had heard is being constructed deep in the forests of Goalpara. Imagine a whole population of millions of people like this, debilitated, rigid with fear and worry about their documentation. It’s not a military occupation; it’s occupation by documentation. These documents are people’s most prized possessions, cared for more lovingly than any child or parent. Grizzled, sun-baked farmers, men and women, scholars of the land and the many moods of the river, use English words like “legacy document,” “certified copy,” “reverification,” “declared foreigner,” “voter list,” and “refugee certificate” as though they were words in their own language. As they are: The NRC has spawned a vocabulary of its own. The saddest phrase in it is “genuine citizen.”

In village after village, people told stories about being

served notices late at night that ordered them to appear in a court 200 or 300 kilometers away the next morning. They described the scramble to assemble family members and their documents, the treacherous rides in small rowboats across the rushing river in pitch darkness, the negotiations with canny transporters on the shore who smelled their desperation and tripled their rates, the reckless drive through the night on dangerous highways. The most chilling story I heard was about a family traveling in a pickup truck that collided with a roadworks truck carrying barrels of tar. The barrels overturned, and the injured family was covered in tar. “When I went to visit them in hospital,” the young activist I was traveling with said, “their young son was trying to pick off the tar on his skin and the tiny stones embedded in it. He looked at his mother and asked, ‘Will we ever get rid of the *kala daag* [stigma] of being foreigners?’”

And yet, despite all this, despite reservations about the process and its implementation, the updating of the NRC was welcomed (enthusiastically by some, warily by others) by almost everybody in Assam, all for reasons of their own. Assamese nationalists hoped that millions of Bengali infiltrators—Hindu and Muslim—would finally be detected and formally declared foreigners. Indigenous tribal communities hoped for some recompense for the historical wrong they had suffered. Hindus as well as Muslims of Bengali origin wanted to see their names on the NRC to prove they were “genuine” Indians, so that the *kala daag* of being “foreign” could be laid to rest once and for all. And the Hindu nationalists—now in government in Assam, too—wanted to see millions of Muslim names deleted from the NRC. Everybody hoped for some form of closure.

After a series of postponements, the final updated list was published on August 31, 2019. The names of 1.9 million people were missing. That number could yet expand because of a provision that permits people—neighbors, enemies, strangers—to lodge appeals. At last count, more than 200,000 objections to the draft NRC had been raised. A great number of those who found their names missing from the list are women and children, most of whom belong to communities where women are married in their early teenage years and by custom have their names changed. They have no “link documents” to prove their legacy. A great number are illiterate people whose names or parents’ names have been wrongly transcribed over the years: a Hasan who became Hassan, a Joynul who became Zainul, a Mohammad whose name has been spelled several ways. A single slip, and you’re out. If your father died or was estranged from your mother, if he didn’t vote, wasn’t educated, and didn’t have land, you’re out. Because in practice, mothers’ legacies don’t count. Among all the prejudices at play in updating the NRC,

**These faded
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cared for more
lovingly than any
child or parent.**

perhaps the greatest is the structural prejudice against women and the poor. And the poor in India today are made up mostly of Muslims, Dalits, and tribals.

After the whole elaborate exercise and the millions of rupees spent on it, the stakeholders in the NRC are all bitterly disappointed with the list. Bengal-origin migrants are disappointed because they know that rightful citizens have been arbitrarily left out. Assamese nationalists are disappointed because the list fell well short of excluding the 5 million purported infiltrators they expected to be found and because they feel too many illegal foreigners have made it onto the list. And India's ruling Hindu nationalists are disappointed because it is estimated that more than half of the 1.9 million are non-Muslims. (The reason for this is ironic: Bengali Muslim migrants, having faced hostility for so long, have spent years gathering their legacy papers. Hindus, being less insecure, have not.)

Demands for a fresh NRC have already begun.

HOW CAN ONE EVEN TRY TO understand this craziness, except by turning to poetry? A group of young Muslim poets, known as the Miya poets, began writing of their pain and humiliation in the language that felt most intimate to them, in the language that until then they had used only in their homes—the Miya dialects of Dhakaiya, Maimansingia, and Pabnaiya. One of those poets, Rehna Sultana, in “Mother,” wrote, “*Ma, ami tumar kachchey aamar poriso diti diti biakul oya dzai.*” (Mother, I’m so tired, tired of introducing myself to you.)

When these poems were posted and circulated widely on Facebook, a private language suddenly became public. And the old specter of linguistic politics reared its head again. Police cases were filed against several of the Miya poets, accusing them of defaming Assamese society. Sultana had to go into hiding.

That there is a problem in Assam cannot be denied. But how is it to be solved? The trouble is that once the torch of ethnonationalism has been lit, it is impossible to know in which direction the wind will take the fire.

Far from being deterred by the chaos and distress created by Assam’s NRC, the Modi government is making arrangements to impose it on the rest of India. To address the possibility of Hindus and its other supporters being caught up in the NRC’s complexities, as happened in Assam, the government has drafted a Citizenship Amendment Bill. (After being passed by Parliament, it is now the citizenship Amendment Act.) It says that all non-Muslim “persecuted minorities” from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan—meaning Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, and Christians—will be given asylum in India. By default, this ensures that those deprived of citizenship will be only Muslims.

Before the process begins, the plan is to update the National Population Register. This will involve a door-

to-door survey in which, in addition to basic census data, the government plans to add to its collection of iris scans and other biometric data. It will be the mother of all data banks.

The groundwork has already been laid. In one of his first acts as home minister, Amit Shah issued a notification permitting state governments across India to set up Foreigners Tribunals and detention centers manned by nonjudicial officers with draconian powers. The governments of Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, and Haryana have begun work. As we have seen, the NRC in Assam grew out of a very particular history. To apply it to the rest of India is pure malevolence. The demand for an updated NRC in Assam is more than 40 years old. There, people have been collecting and holding on to their documents for 50 years. How many people in India can produce legacy documents? Perhaps not even Modi—whose date of birth, college degree, and marital status have all been the subject of national controversies.

We are being told that the India-wide NRC is an

exercise to detect several million Bangladeshi “infiltrators”—“termites,” as our home minister likes to call them. What does he imagine language like this will do to India’s relationship with Bangladesh? There is no doubt that a great many undocumented workers from Bangladesh live in India. There is also no doubt that they make up one of the poorest, most marginalized populations in the country. Anybody who claims to believe in the free

market should know that they are only filling a vacant economic slot by doing work that others will not do, for wages nobody else will accept. They are not the ones destroying the country. They are not the corporate con men stealing public money or bankrupting the banks. They are merely a decoy, a Trojan horse for the RSS.

The real purpose of an all-India NRC is to threaten, destabilize, and stigmatize the Indian Muslim community, particularly the poorest among them. It is meant to formalize an unequal, tiered society, in which one set of people has no rights and lives at the mercy or on the goodwill of another—a modern caste system that will exist alongside the ancient one, with Muslims as the new Dalits. Not notionally but actually, legally. In places like West Bengal, where the BJP is on an aggressive takeover drive, suicides have already begun.

Here is M.S. Golwalkar, the supreme leader of the RSS in 1940, in his book *We, or Our Nationhood Defined*:

Ever since that evil day, when Moslems first landed in Hindustan, right up to the present moment, the Hindu Nation has been gallantly fighting to take on these despoilers. The Race Spirit has been awakening.

In Hindustan, land of the Hindus, lives and should live the Hindu Nation....

All others are traitors and enemies to the National Cause, or, to take a charitable view,

Once the torch of
ethnonationalism
has been lit, it is
impossible to know
in which direction
the wind will take
the fire.



Islands in the stream: Temporary homes on Char Marichakandi, an island of silt in the Brahmaputra River.

idiots.... The foreign races in Hindustan...may stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu Nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment—not even citizens' rights.

Golwalkar continues:

To keep up the purity of its race and culture, Germany shocked the world by her purging the country of the Semitic races—the Jews. Race pride at its highest has been manifested here ... a good lesson for us in Hindustan to learn and profit by.

HOW DO YOU TRANSLATE THIS IN MODERN terms? Coupled with the Citizenship Amendment Bill, the National Register of Citizenship is India's version of the 1935 Nuremberg Laws, by which German citizenship was restricted to those who had been granted citizenship papers—legacy papers—by the government of the Third Reich. The amendment excluding Muslims is the first such measure. Others will no doubt follow, against Christians, Dalits, communists—all enemies of the RSS.

The Foreigners Tribunals and detention centers that have already started to spring up across India may not, at the moment, be intended to accommodate hundreds of millions of Muslims. But they are meant to remind us that only Hindus are considered India's real aboriginals.

Even the 460-year-old Babri Masjid didn't have the right legacy papers. What chance would a poor Muslim farmer or street vendor have?

This is the wickedness that the 50,000 people in Houston were cheering. This is what the president of the United States linked hands with Modi to support. It's what the Israelis want to partner with, the Germans want to trade with, the French want to sell fighter jets to, and the Saudis want to fund.

Perhaps the whole process of the all-India NRC can be privatized, including the data bank with our iris scans. The employment opportunities and accompanying profits might revive our dying economy. The detention centers could be built by the Indian equivalents of Siemens, Bayer, and IG Farben. It isn't hard to guess which corporations those will be. Even if we don't get to the Zyklon B stage, there's plenty of money to be made.

We can only hope that someday soon, the streets in India will throng with people who realize that unless they make their move, the end is near.

If that doesn't happen, consider these words to be portents of an ending from one who lived through these times. ■

If the Supreme Court of India can rule that the 460-year-old Babri Mosque has no right to exist, what chance does a poor Muslim farmer have?



The Nation.



GREEN NEW DEAL SENATOR

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Dempeachment is a big deal. So is the 2020 presidential election. Plenty of advocates for executive accountability and even a few White House contenders are deserving of honor. But *The Nation's* annual honor roll has always had a bias toward those who do the steady work of advancing economic, social, and racial justice but do not always enjoy the spotlight. Here are a few of 2019's most valuable progressive officials, activists, organizations, and ideas that are shaping the future.

GREEN NEW DEAL SENATOR

Ed Markey

If this veteran Massachusetts legislator were running for president, he'd echo past honor roll stars Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren. Instead, Markey has gone big in the Senate, aligning with younger representatives to advance bold structural change. With Representative Ted Lieu, Markey has introduced legislation to prevent the president from launching a nuclear first strike without congressional approval. After the Federal Communications Commission repealed net neutrality protections, Markey joined Representative Mike Doyle in introducing the Save the Internet Act. In February, he joined Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez to sponsor the Green New Deal resolution to address climate change and the next economy. "He's not just resting on his record of the past, but he's aggressively pursuing an agenda for the future," Ocasio-Cortez says of Markey. "And that's what a progressive is, and that's what progressivism [is] all about."



Ed Markey

"He's aggressively pursuing an agenda for the future."

—Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez



Ayanna Pressley

THINK-BIG REPRESENTATIVE

Ayanna Pressley

Elected in 2018, Pressley hit the ground running with innovative and courageous demands for think-big changes. The Massachusetts Democrat has worked closely with Ocasio-Cortez and Representative Barbara Lee to overturn the 43-year-old Hyde Amendment, which bars using federal funds for abortions. "Hyde's days are numbered," Pressley says. "Tick-tock, y'all." She responded to Attorney General Bill Barr's plan to resume federal capital punishment by introducing a sweeping abolition measure. Last March she proposed an amendment to lower the federal election voting age to 16. The amendment received 126 votes to add it to the For the People Act—not enough to pass, but Pressley isn't backing off. "From gun violence to climate change, our young people are organizing, mobilizing, and calling us to action," she says. "They are at the forefront of social and legislative movements and have earned inclusion in our democracy."



Anna Eskamani

INNOVATIVE STATE OFFICIAL

Sarah Godlewski

Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker thought he would have an easy time passing a 2018 referendum to eliminate the elected position of state treasurer. Then Godlewski, a 38-year-old political newcomer who had spent much of her adult life working on micro finance and social investment issues, organized a grassroots campaign that argued every state needs an independent financial watchdog. Voters agreed. They rejected Walker's scheme 61 to 39 percent in the spring of 2018, and that fall—on the same day Walker was voted out as governor—they voted Godlewski in as treasurer. Since then, she has developed plans to tackle the retirement crisis, championed women's economic empowerment, and used her position as the new chair of the state's powerful Board of Commissioners of Public Lands to launch environmental protection initiatives. Her approach offers a model for seeking, winning, and revitalizing neglected local and statewide posts.

ACTIVIST LEGISLATOR

Anna Eskamani

A University of Central Florida campus organizer who went to work for Planned Parenthood at 22, Eskamani took her activism to the next level in 2018. She flipped a Republican-held state House seat representing the Orlando district that was home to Pulse, the LGBTQ dance club that in 2016 experienced the second-worst mass shooting by a single gunman in modern US history. Eskamani wanted to shake up the legislature, and she started immediately by refusing to attend a freshman reception hosted by powerful corporate lobbying groups. In her first year, she sponsored more than 20 bills on reproductive rights and LGBTQ community services, poverty, immigration, and criminal justice. Most were rejected by the Republican-controlled legislature. But she has won more than her share of fights with an inside-outside model for activism that has earned her national recognition for challenging the NRA and lobbyists, forcing Florida's conservative gov-



ernor to show respect for the LGBTQ community, and joining immigrant rights struggles as the proud daughter of Iranian expatriates.

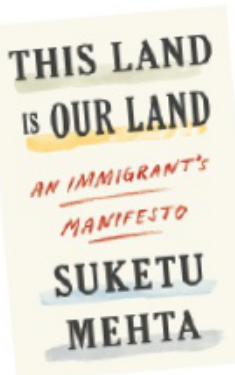
MUNICIPAL SOCIALIST

Carlos Ramirez-Rosa

The August *Chicago* magazine headline said it all: “How Socialism Permeated City Council.” One of 2019’s biggest local politics stories was the renewal of municipal socialism in cities across the country, as a new generation of city councilors and school board members, many associated with and backed by the Democratic Socialists of America, swept into office. Nowhere did that wave hit harder than Chicago, where six democratic socialists won council seats this year, creating a socialist caucus that, in combination with progressive allies, has real influence on issues like affordable housing and a proposal to study a city takeover of the local power grid. Most of the DSA members are newcomers, but Ramirez-Rosa, a 30-year-old Chicago native, is in his second term. Reelected with ease this year, he has shown the way with bold initiatives such as participatory budgeting, a democratic process he uses to let community members directly decide how to spend roughly \$1 million on ward infrastructure improvements.



Carlos Ramirez-Rosa



“Change never happens when people are comfortable.”

— Suffolk County District Attorney Rachael Rollins

PROGRESSIVE PROSECUTORS

Kim Foxx, Rachael Rollins, and Larry Krasner

Prosecutors are proving that local elections matter and making real their promises of reform. According to Rollins, the district attorney of Suffolk County, Massachusetts, “Change never happens when people are comfortable.” Her disruptive agenda includes decriminalizing low-level offenses: “We can hold people accountable without sending them to jail.” State’s Attorney Foxx of Cook County, Illinois, has personally filed the first motions to vacate roughly 1,000 low-level cannabis convictions. Philadelphia District Attorney Krasner pulls the threads together when he argues, “The old policies don’t just break individuals, many of whom did not need to be broken. They break communities, and they break cities for a whole host of economic and social reasons.” These new DAs have started working together to encourage the election of more of what the *Los Angeles Times* referred to as “new-style prosecutors...seeking to end mass incarceration, eliminate cash bail, divert more defendants into drug treatment programs, eradicate the death penalty and reverse wrongful convictions.” It’s working. In November, reformer Chesa Boudin won a high-profile race for San Francisco DA, with backing from Krasner, Foxx, and Rollins.



Rachael Rollins



Leyla McCalla

NEW-STYLE JUDGE

Franklin Bynum

Changing the criminal justice system requires more than a different kind of DA. It also requires new judges like Franklin Bynum. Elected in 2018 to the Harris County

Criminal Court bench in Houston, Bynum, a 37-year-old democratic socialist, moved immediately to unravel and replace what he calls the “oppressive punishment bureaucracies” that stand in the way of justice. Arguing that “people need care, not cages,” he has focused on ending the cash bail system. He has brought to the bench the perspective of an experienced criminal defense lawyer who knows the system can be more rational and humane. He recalls when a prosecutor objected to his telling the story of a death-row exoneree during jury selection in a case he was trying as a capital defense lawyer. The judge sustained the objection. Bynum says, “I get to tell the story now, because I’m the judge.”

CHANGING THE POLITICAL CLIMATE

Sunrise Movement

The genius of the Sunrise Movement’s climate justice activists is that they challenge not just individual politicians but the political process itself. In 2019 the group organized marches, rallies, and strikes on behalf of a climate justice agenda of decarbonization, jobs, and justice. It demanded that Democratic politicians sign on for a Green New Deal. And it pressured the Democratic National Committee to hold a single-issue presidential debate on the climate crisis. CNN and MSNBC agreed to organize town halls and forums. The Sunrise Movement is keeping pressure on the DNC with protests, banner drops, and lobbying that refuses to take “no” for an answer.

POWER IN A UNION

Chicago Teachers Union

Teacher strikes are a big deal now, as educators and allied public school employees struggle for resources and respect in an age of austerity budgets and privatization schemes. For years, the Chicago Teachers Union has provided a model for militant trade unionism by making big demands, organizing with parents and students, and building winning coalitions. The CTU struck in the fall of 2019 and won big, securing mandatory class size caps, sanctuary school protections for immigrant and refugee students, and staffing commitments that include a guarantee that there will be a nurse and a social worker in every school, every day. “Our contract fight was about the larger movement to shift values and priorities in Chicago,” says CTU vice president Stacy Davis Gates. “In a city with immense wealth, corporations have the ability to pay to support the common good.”

NEXT BIG IDEA

Universal Family Care

Imagine if there were a program to help make the costs of raising or caring for a family manageable. Imagine “if new parents could draw on a public family care insurance fund to take paid leave to bond with their new babies and then use it to pay for trusted daycare so that they can re-

turn to work. [Imagine] if relatives of an aging loved one could tap into that same fund to hire a home care worker so they don't have to quit their jobs and move cross-country to provide care." So asks Caring Across Generations, which launched the movement for the social insurance program last June. Ai-jen Poo, one of today's most innovative organizers, is the codirector of the group, which seeks to build coalitions in support of a public insurance fund to make family care affordable and accessible to all. As with Medicare for All, the fight for universal family care seeks to transform the lives of both the people who need care and those who provide it.

MULTIMEDIA NEWS

Rising Up With Sonali

Hosted by author and activist Sonali Kolhatkar, this all-women-run radio and television program promises "progressive news coverage rooted in gender and racial justice to a wide audience." It delivers, with a radio program airing on Pacifica stations such as KPFA and KPFA and a show on Free Speech TV. Kolhatkar's conversations with guests go deep. Even when she's covering topics everyone else is covering—like impeachment—she infuses the discussion with economic, social, and racial justice perspectives that reframe and expand the debate. The show's international reports highlight working-class struggles and the experiences of women and indigenous people.

RESILIENT MUSIC

Leyla McCalla's The Capitalist Blues

There are many ways to reveal the corruptions of wealth and power. McCalla does it with an elegant blend of Creole, Cajun, jazz, gospel, zydeco, and Haitian rara influences that makes the music as instructive as the words she uses to illuminate the experiences of workers, immigrants, and folks who have fallen on hard times. Sometimes edgy, sometimes moody, always enlightening, this is music that *Songlines* magazine hailed as "a soulful rumination on the effects of living in an unjust society." McCalla, a brilliant multi-instrumentalist whose previous work explored the poetry of Langston Hughes, says, "I never imagined that *The Capitalist Blues* could make me so damn happy, and perhaps that represents the paradox of it all."

THINK-AGAIN BOOK

Suketu Mehta's This Land Is Our Land: An Immigrant's Manifesto

"These days, a great many people in the rich countries complain loudly about migration from the poor ones," writes Mehta in this argument for new thinking on old issues. "But as the migrants see it, the game was rigged: First, the rich countries colonized us and stole our treasure and prevented us from building our industries. After plundering us for centuries, they left, having drawn up maps in ways that ensured permanent strife between our communities. Then they brought us to their countries as 'guest workers'—as if they knew what the word 'guest' meant in our cultures—but discouraged us from bringing our families." The system was never fair, and now "again, they ask us not to come, desperate and starving though they have rendered us, because the richest among them need a scapegoat. This is how the game is rigged today." Mehta's book, published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux, is a strikingly effective counter not just to Donald Trump but to the xenophobia the United States needs to understand and reject. ■

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RAISING



IG A

STINK

**Will the world's leading
pork producer be held
responsible for making life
unbearable in rural Southern
communities?**

BARRY YEOMAN

IN A FEDERAL COURTROOM IN RALEIGH, NORTH CAROLINA, A 14-YEAR-OLD HONOR student named Alexandria McKoy swore to tell the truth. Then she settled in to testify against the world's largest pork producer.

McKoy had traveled 90 miles from Bladen County, part of the flat and farm-heavy coastal plain that covers most of eastern North Carolina. Her family lives on a sandy cul-de-sac that recedes into a driveway flanked by "No Trespassing" signs. Her mother grew up on that land, working in the fields with her sharecropper father and playing in the woods nearby.

In the mid-1990s, a farmer named Billy Kinlaw bought the property at the end of the road. He built a dozen swine houses and three waste lagoons, large open pits that hold a slurry of feces and urine turned pink by bacterial action. Kinlaw began raising pigs, with a permit to house more than 14,000 at a time, most recently under contract to Murphy-Brown, the hog production subsidiary of Virginia-based Smithfield Foods.

During the late 20th century, as the tobacco economy declined, farms like Kinlaw's transformed North Carolina into the country's No. 2 hog production state, after Iowa. The state's 2,300 swine operations are responsible for most of the 10 billion gallons of wet livestock waste generated in North Carolina, according to a 2016 analysis by the Environmental Working Group and Waterkeeper Alliance, an international clean water group. There are roughly 3,300 waste lagoons, which occasionally overflow or breach their walls, particularly during hurricanes.

Many of the farms are near the homes of African American families like the McKoys. The journal *Environmental Health Perspectives*, which is funded by the federal government, described the smell in these rural communities as "reminiscent of rotten eggs and ammonia."

McKoy's bedroom was close enough to the farm, she testified, that she could hear the animals squeal. "Like screeching—a screeching noise," she said. She added that she could smell their waste, too, and tried to mask it with an air freshener and scented candles. Hog farm neighbors often complain that the odor, while intermittent, is so overpowering that they cannot tend their gardens, hang their laundry, or invite relatives over for cookouts. Industrial farms, they say, also bring flies, buzzards, and intense truck traffic day and night.

In 2014 more than 500 North Carolinians, most of them African American, blitzed Murphy-Brown with more than two dozen federal lawsuits. The plaintiffs included McKoy, her mother, and her elder brother. They

**Alexandria
McKoy
testified that
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squeal: "Like
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a screeching
noise."**

Pigging out:
Young hogs at a
farm in Farmville,
North Carolina.

AP PHOTO / GERRY BROOME

*Barry Yeoman is a
freelance journalist
living in Durham,
North Carolina.*



argued that Smithfield, which dominates the state's swine industry and owns the animals raised under the company's contracts, has the resources to phase out the prevailing waste management system, which involves storing the pigs' feces and urine in lagoons and then spraying it onto fields as fertilizer. They said the company can dispose of waste in less noxious ways but refuses to do so.

The plaintiffs accused Smithfield of creating a "private nuisance," which the North Carolina Supreme Court has described as an "invasion" of someone's "private use and enjoyment of land."

Smithfield called the complaints exaggerated and the alternatives too costly. It described the lawsuits as "a money grab by a big litigation machine." In April 2018, Smithfield defense attorney Mark Anderson told jurors that the case wasn't really about the plaintiffs at all. "These are good people," he said. "They are here because of other people's agendas."

On the witness stand, McKoy recounted the things she couldn't do outdoors: practice her flute, ride her bike, and sit on her grandmother's porch and read. (At the time, she was enjoying a novel about a werewolf.) Recently, she said, she invited a classmate over, and they got off the school bus to an awful stench. "Where is that smell coming from?" her friend asked. "Is it coming from your house?"

Other children, McKoy testified, covered their faces with their shirts as the bus approached her house. Or they peered out the windows, trying to find the source. "I don't want people to remember me by a smell," she said.

For three weeks, the jury listened to dueling narratives. Some neighbors described their diminished lives. Others, including a couple who attended oyster roasts and pig pickings at the Kinlaw farm, insisted there was no offensive odor. Jurors watched video testimony of Steve Wing, an epidemiologist who died before the trial, describing the headaches, coughing, and nausea he found in higher numbers among hog farm neighbors than among cattle farm neighbors and those who didn't live near intensive livestock farms. Wing spent two decades documenting the harms, including asthma symptoms and elevated blood pressure, suffered by those living or attending school near swine operations.

Wing, who was an associate professor at the University of North Carolina, described a letter he received from lawyers representing the North Carolina Pork Council. That letter demanded the confidential identities of the people interviewed for his study.

Hog haven:
Pig houses seen from the road at a farm outside White Oak in Bladen County, North Carolina.

"If you ever had a sick child that had diarrhea and you accidentally left the Pampers in a hot car and you got in the car two days later—that impact."

—Lendora Farland,
Duplin County resident

Anderson told jurors that North Carolina's hog farms are "highly regulated." Don Butler, a retired Smithfield executive, acknowledged writing a 1999 memo explaining that the state's new odor rules, which he helped shape, "are so vague and subjective that enforcement will be difficult. This may be to our benefit."

The jury came back with a knockout verdict: Not only was Smithfield responsible for its neighbors' suffering, but it had also acted wantonly enough to warrant punitive damages. The jury awarded the 10 plaintiffs \$50.75 million combined, though the award was reduced to \$3.25 million because of a state cap on punitive damages.

It was the first of five trials in 2018 and 2019—a bellwether case for the other suits. Smithfield lost all five, even the two for which it chose the plaintiffs. It was assessed wildly different damage awards, from \$102,400 to \$473.5 million. The latter was scaled back to \$94 million because of the cap.

Smithfield has appealed the first three verdicts, which were the largest, to the Fourth US Circuit Court of Appeals, calling the litigation an "almost existential threat" to North Carolina farmers. The court is scheduled to hear oral arguments on the first case, involving the Kinlaw farm, starting January 28. If the Fourth Circuit upholds the awards, that could green-light the cases of hundreds more plaintiffs—a protracted legal battle over environmental justice.

A single verdict might be an anomaly; five are hard to ignore. The litigation sparked a public relations offensive: Smithfield called most of the trials unfair and the lawsuits "an outrageous attack on animal agriculture." And the suits triggered a chain of political backlash and counterbacklash spanning all three branches of North Carolina's government.

WHEN INDUSTRIAL HOG FARMS STARTED DOTTING North Carolina's coastal plain in the 1980s and '90s, their impact did not fall evenly. A 2014 study by Wing and his colleague Jill Johnston concluded that African Americans, Native Americans, and Latinos are more likely than whites to live within three miles of a large swine operation. The industry disputes the study's conclusion, calling Wing an environmental justice ad-



“You can never be complacent when you’ve been forced to live with animal waste that’s blowing on you and you have to smell it.”

—Elsie Herring, plaintiff

vocate rather than a neutral scientist and describing the three-mile standard as so broad that it encompasses entire counties.

Those farms quintupled the state’s hog population over four decades, to 9 million today. They set up shop in rural communities where, regardless of race, life centers on gardens, porches, and yards. “We were always staying outside,” said Lendora Farland, a 48-year-old patient care assistant who lives in the Duplin County home where she grew up. (Her parents are plaintiffs.) “Our house was the neighborhood house where the kids came,” where they played dodgeball and basketball and ate her mother’s homemade biscuits. The family grew cucumbers, field peas, watermelon, okra, tomatoes, and sweet potatoes. They raised livestock, too, and shared the bounty.

“If we had a hog killing, the neighbors would come over, and we would give them a portion,” she said. “Or if we were doing corn, which is a big job—cutting corn off the cob—the neighbors would help, and we would divide that.”

When a hog farm opened next door in 1985, Farland said, the odor was nothing like that of her family’s five pigs. “If you ever had a sick child that had diarrhea and you accidentally left the Pamper in a hot car and you got in the car two days later—that impact,” she said. Their laundry, hanging on a clothesline, started smelling like hog waste, she recalled, so it became a Saturday morning ritual to visit the launderette. “We would be there at 5:30—the man didn’t get there till 6—just to wait in line to dry our clothes.”

Outdoor gatherings grew infrequent and awkward. “Last year, we had a Father’s Day cookout here, because my dad was too weak to go anywhere,” she said. “To me that day, it didn’t smell bad. But to my cousins, it was an awful smell. One of them, she said, ‘Lendora, I can’t take it. I got to go.’”

Matthew Carter, whose family owns the farm next door to Farland’s home, declined an interview request on behalf of the family. His father, Joey Carter, testified that he was unaware of any problem. “I’m in the neighborhood every day when I’m over there, and up until the lawsuit, I didn’t know there was an odor issue or nothing,” said the elder Carter, who is a retired local police chief.

Odor is too subjective to be precisely quantified, experts on both sides testified. One of them, Clarkson University environmental engineer Shane Rogers, said he found Pig2Bac, a DNA marker of odor-carrying swine waste, on the plaintiffs’ houses near the Carter and Kinlaw farms. “It’s a physical representation of feces,” he told a jury. “It’s an actual physical measurement of feces moving from the operation to the sampling device.” Smithfield’s expert witnesses disputed Rogers’s conclusions.

SMITHFIELD DECLINED SEVERAL INTERVIEW REQUESTS. Its executives, lawyers, and political allies argue that the private-nuisance claims were manufactured by trial lawyers looking to get rich from high-dollar jury awards. “There was harmony in that part of the county until this lawsuit got brought. Until people from outside came in with an agenda,” Anderson told jurors in the first trial.

In fact, the disharmony in swine country predates the litigation. “We had been organizing long before we were able to get a lawyer,” said plaintiff Elsie Herring, who lives in Duplin County and is retired from a banking career. “Perhaps they had this sense that we were complacent. But you can never be complacent when you’ve been forced to live with animal waste that’s blowing on you and you have to smell it. No, there was nothing nice about what was happening in our communities.”

In 2016, Environmental Protection Agency investigators interviewed more than 60 hog farm neighbors, whom the agency found “credible.” In a letter to the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality

Elsie Herring, 71, at her home in Wallace, North Carolina, on land that has been in her family since 1891.



(NC DEQ), the EPA said that several neighbors considered themselves “prisoners in their own homes”; some had given up hope that state regulators would protect them.

“Several residents said that for more than 15 years, the government has been well aware of the conditions they have to live with, but has done nothing to help, so complaining to NC DEQ would be futile,” wrote Lilian Dorka, the director of the EPA’s External Civil Rights Compliance Office.

The EPA said that those who did complain reported “retaliation, threats, intimidation, and harassment.” In 1998, Herring received a letter from a farmer’s attorney saying that if she persisted in making “groundless claims” against his client, eventually “we will ask the Court to put you in prison.”

None of the contract farmers were named in the lawsuits. Still, they consider themselves collateral victims. Kinlaw describes himself as a hardworking farmer with an unblemished regulatory record. He insisted in an interview that his neighbors signed onto the lawsuit not because of legitimate grievances but because they expected to win “millions of dollars.”

“I’ll also point this out,” he said. “I don’t mean to say I’m racist by any means, because some of these black people I consider friends of mine. I’ve been knowing them all my life, and I’m 80 years old. Like I said, they’ve just been brainwashed. But there’s white people that live right beside these folks. Not the first white person has appeared against me.” (There are some white plaintiffs in the lawsuits. Their cases involve other farms.)

“It don’t take a smart person to figure this out,” he added. “Make your own deductions. I told you the truth.”

THE HOG INDUSTRY HAS LONG FOUND ALLIES IN THE North Carolina legislature. Twenty-four years ago, in its Pulitzer Prize-winning “Boss Hog” investigation, the *Raleigh News & Observer* documented how pork producer and lawmaker Wendell Murphy and his allies helped protect large farms with sales-tax exemptions and limits on county zoning powers. A state law passed in 2014 kept complaints from the public against farm operations confidential. That made it harder to track whether regulators



Sticky situation: A plaintiff in one of the first five cases against Smithfield documented a fly infestation.

The EPA said that some neighbors considered themselves “prisoners in their own homes.”

Hog piled: This photo of pig carcasses in a “dead box” was submitted as part of a lawsuit against Smithfield.



were taking those complaints seriously.

The recent lawsuits provoked yet another round of legislative protections. In 2017 lawmakers voted to limit future nuisance damages, leaving the industry on the hook only for the diminished sale or rental value of a plaintiff’s home. In effect, they stripped hog farm neighbors of the right to sue for personal suffering.

During the debate, Representative Jimmy Dixon, a Duplin County Republican and one of the bill’s sponsors, addressed the lawsuits directly. “Ladies and gentlemen,” he said, “when the final chapter is written on these kinds of cases, I will tell you that the very people who are pretended to be represented are being prostituted for money.”

“I’ve lived on a farm all my life,” he added. “My children and my grandchildren have walked gleefully with me through my hog houses and...have played around the lagoons.” Yes, he said, livestock farms produce some “adversities.” Still, “every single one of us in this chamber should, on a regular basis, get down on our knees and thank our heavenly father that there are people who are willing to put up with the circumstances of production so that we can enjoy the benefits of consumption.”

According to Vote Smart, a nonpartisan research group, Dixon received \$28,975 from the livestock industry during the 2018 election cycle, out of \$250,593 he raised. Among his top donors were the North Carolina Farm Bureau (\$10,400), the North Carolina Pork Council (\$8,200), and Smithfield Foods (\$5,200). He told the nonprofit newsroom ProPublica last year that campaign contributions don’t influence his decisions.

Elizabeth Haddix, a managing attorney at the North Carolina regional office of the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, calls the 2017 measure a departure from centuries of legal tradition. “The right to use and enjoy your property without unreasonable interference—that’s been common law since before we were the United States,” said Haddix, who represents several groups fighting the adverse impacts of industrial livestock farming. The law, she continued, will hinder legitimate sufferers from suing. “Lawyers don’t take these tort cases unless they’re going to get big damages, because that’s how they get paid.”

Democratic Governor Roy Cooper vetoed the bill. Lawmakers overrode the veto. They overrode another veto in 2018, on a bill restricting potential nuisance-suit plaintiffs to those who live within a half-mile of the alleged nuisance and sue within a year after a farm opens or makes a “fundamental change.” (Switching products or expanding is not considered fundamental.) North Carolina has had a de facto moratorium on new swine operations since 1997, which essentially means the law disqualifies all hog farm neighbors from making nuisance claims.

Even though the restrictions were passed by the state legislature, they still apply to federal lawsuits. That’s because federal judges often defer to state laws and legal standards in, for example, defining a nuisance. (This also explains why the federal court had to respect the state’s cap on punitive damages.) “In a diversity case such as this”—with North Carolina plaintiffs and a Virginia-based defendant—“the court applies the con-

trolling state's substantive law, which here is North Carolina," senior District Judge W. Earl Britt wrote in one order, echoing a 1938 Supreme Court decision.

In June the Lawyers' Committee sued the state, asking the court to declare both laws unconstitutional. The four plaintiffs include the North Carolina Environmental Justice Network and Waterkeeper Alliance. That case is pending.

AS THE VERDICTS ROLLED IN LAST YEAR, SMITHFIELD announced a change in how it will handle its hog waste in North Carolina and two other states. It plans to cover many of the lagoons, capture the methane, and convert it to energy. In an e-mail, Smithfield spokesperson Lisa Martin said the announcement was the culmination of decades of research, but she did not comment on the lawsuits.

In May 2018, Smithfield wrote in a letter to Kinlaw that the plaintiffs "produced no scientific data" to deem his farm a nuisance. "However, as long as the verdict stands, continued placement of pigs at your Farm poses a significant risk of more costly litigation." He was in "material breach" of his contract and had 10 days to "cure" the odor, flies, buzzards, and noise. When he said this would be impossible, the company removed its pigs and stopped delivering new ones.

In the letter Smithfield did not specify how Kinlaw was supposed to fix a problem that the company insists does not exist. Asked whether Smithfield believes Kinlaw

"You do something for 20-something years, and they pull the plug on you, and you haven't done anything to cause that."

—Billy Kinlaw,
pig farmer

did anything wrong, Martin declined to answer.

Smithfield also stopped supplying the other farms mentioned at trial. On Facebook, Matthew Carter posted a video of a Smithfield truck hauling a double-decker load of animals past a row of feed bins. "I guess I'm no longer a hog farmer," he recalled his father saying.

Kinlaw said the ordeal caused him to lose his respect for the legal system. "It hurts your soul," he said. "You do something for 20-something years, and they pull the plug on you, and you haven't done anything to cause that. It makes you wonder what in the world is going on." Because of the circumstances, the company agreed to keep paying him a monthly fee, at least for now. "If it weren't for Smithfield upholding their contract," he said, "I'd be in a mess."

Living beside the Carter farm, Farland has a different perspective. When she agreed to testify, she understood that relief might come too late for her aging parents. At least if the plaintiffs prevailed, she said, her nieces and nephews might be able to enjoy playing outdoors again.

Her parents are still alive. Her father lives in a nursing home. Many weekends she picks him up and takes him back to the house where she and her mother still live. One Saturday they were sitting on the porch, she recalled, when he said, "Lendora, this smells like home." ■

This story was produced by the Food & Environment Reporting Network, an independent nonprofit news organization.

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(continued from page 2)

support increased taxes on the wealthy on distributional grounds as opposed to revenue-raising grounds. There are good reasons for decreasing the spending capacity of the rich (via taxes, etc.), but none of those reasons relate to whether the government has the financial capacity to provide first-class public services to the poor (or the rest of the population). Trickle-down is a neoliberal myth. We can agree on that. Putting spending power into the hands of those who will only save it does nothing for growth, which is a point I made in the article.

For more growth to occur, spending power has to be in the hands of those who spend, so I would probably adjust tax policy accordingly and impose higher taxes on the wealthy and lower them on working- and middle-class Americans.

I also pointed out that inequality is a constraint on economic growth, as more and more of the gains are concentrated in the hands of those with the highest savings propensities. Prior to the 1970s, when neoliberal ideas started to gain prominence, real wage growth largely tracked productivity growth, which meant that as the productive capacity of the system expanded, the capacity of the workers to maintain consumption standards out of wages also grew in proportion.

Some high incomes were produced, but these typically came from success in building things and spreading the gains (somewhat) to workers.

Now high incomes come from the financial sector, capturing an increasing share of national income and using it to shuffle financial assets in the financial markets casino, which adds about zero to productive

output. So yes, I have no problems taxing the wealthy under those circumstances.

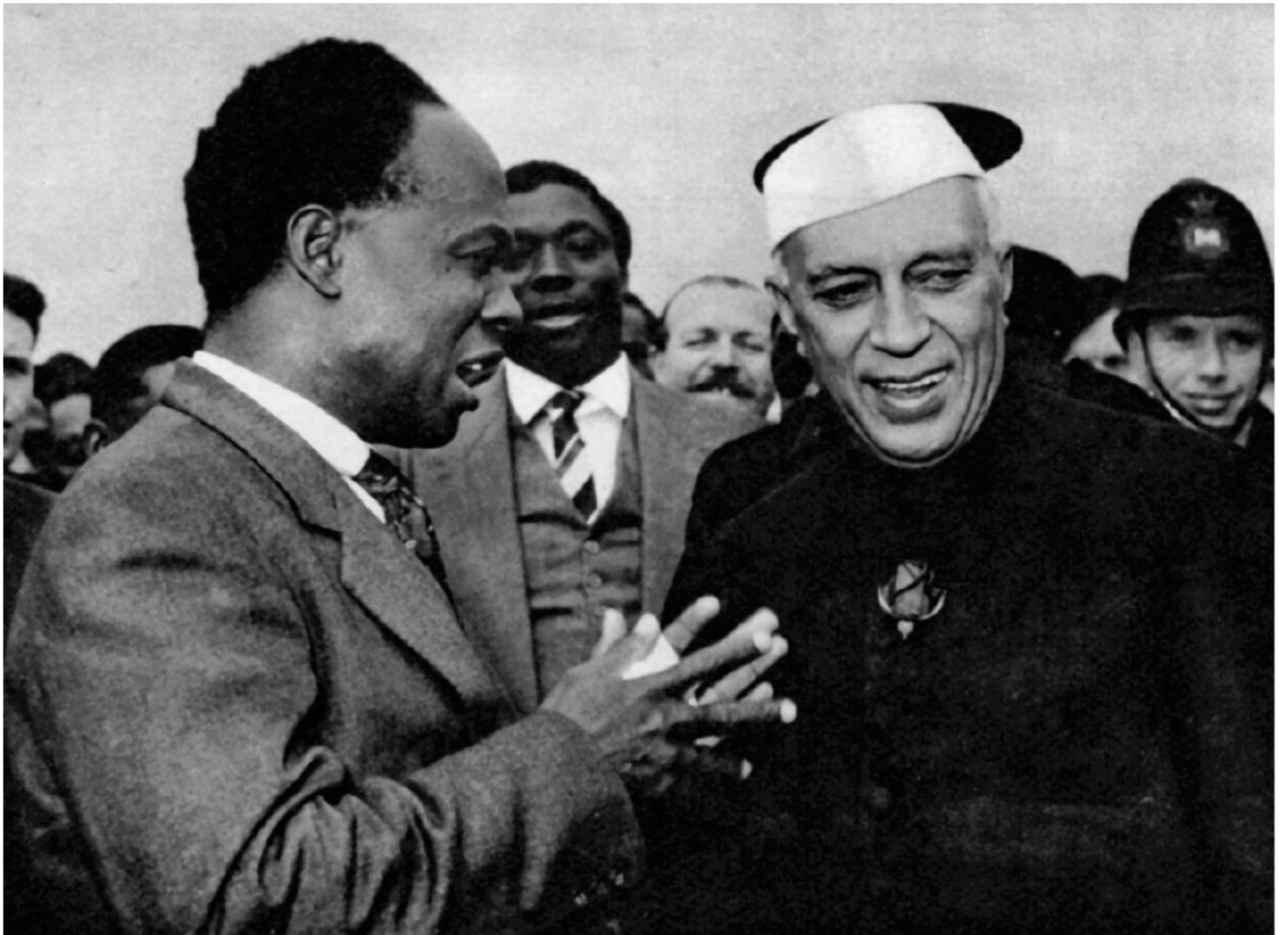
Also, I never suggested that deficits don't matter, which is a common mischaracterization. What matters are the real resource constraints, as opposed to some arbitrary number that people try to equate with sound finance. In other words, *if* the economy is at full capacity, then a government has to divert resources from other uses into a specific service that it wishes to expand. In such situations, clearly some moderation of deficit spending is required.

I would do that via taxation. But the taxation is freeing up real resources to be used in the desired way by depriving the nongovernment sector of their use. It is not giving the government extra money, which enables it to spend.

More generally, taxing the rich is part of a progressive agenda because it reduces the power of the rich to exploit the political process for their purposes. It is mostly true that a government can spend more if its tax revenue is higher and the economy is operating at full employment. For a currency-issuing government, this has nothing to do with the tax revenue providing more money to the government, which would allow it to spend more.

The point is that the higher tax revenue implies that the nongovernment sector has less spending capacity and that more real resources are left idle so the government can bring them into productive use by spending more. That is the essence of the sectoral-balances approach that I discussed. The qualification is if the higher tax revenue comes only from unspent nongovernment income or other tax bases and there is no impact on nongovernment spending. MARSHALL AUERBACK

Books & the Arts



A WORLD TO WIN

Decolonization and the pursuit of a more egalitarian international order

by **DANIEL IMMERWAHR**

If you were asked, in March 1957, to pick a capital for the black world, there would have been only one answer: Accra, Ghana. It was there, at the Old Polo Grounds, that the first sub-Saharan African colony to gain independence in the post-World War II era celebrated its freedom. “At long last, the battle has ended,” announced Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana’s first prime

minister. As the new national anthem played, he wept.

Nkrumah wasn’t the only one. Accra bristled with black leaders from around the world. Martin Luther King Jr. and A. Philip Randolph from the United States; Julius Nyerere, the future first president of Tanzania; the St. Lucian economist W. Arthur Lewis and the Trinidadian historian C.L.R. James—virtually the whole A-list was there. Louis Armstrong and W.E.B. Du Bois were missing, but Armstrong’s wife, Lucille Wilson, was on hand to extend good wishes, and Du

Bois would eventually move to Ghana and spend his last years in Accra.

Richard Nixon was there, too, dispatched by President Dwight Eisenhower to represent the United States. “How does it feel to be free?” he asked a black guest at dinner, according to a frequently told story. “I don’t know,” came the response. “I’m from Alabama.”

That exchange, though probably apocryphal, is nevertheless telling. In 1957, when it came to liberation, Ghana was ahead of the United States. And the country’s independence “opened wide

*Daniel Immerwahr teaches history at Northwestern and is the author of *Thinking Small* and *How to Hide an Empire*.*

the floodgates of African freedom,” Nkrumah wrote. By the end of 1960, 17 more former colonies had joined the United Nations as independent states; five years later, there were 33. While the US government dithered about whether African Americans living in the South should be able to vote and attend state universities, black people from Kingston to Nairobi were flying new flags and taking seats in their national parliaments.

It was an exciting time, but it was also a dangerous one. Both the excitement and danger were on display in the Republic of the Congo in 1960. Under Belgian rule, the Congo had endured some of the most murderous governance in colonialism’s bloody history, and the new prime minister, Patrice Lumumba, didn’t mince words: At the new republic’s flag-raising, he gave a defiant speech castigating Belgium. The free Congo would “show the world what the black man can do when he works in freedom,” he promised.

That freedom, however, was at risk almost from the start. Less than two weeks after his speech, Belgian officials prodded a group of rebels led by Moïse Tshombe in the resource-rich southern province of Katanga to declare independence. European mining companies backed the rebels, expecting to secure better deals from Tshombe than from the anti-imperialist Lumumba. The Belgian government, thinking along similar lines, dispatched an assassin to kill Lumumba; ready to pitch in, the CIA sent two assassins as well. Before any of the killers reached their mark, Tshombe’s men got hold of Lumumba and tortured and executed him. They buried the body but later dug it up, chopped it into bits, and dissolved it in acid so that no one would be able to visit his grave.

Nkrumah, who had regarded Lumumba as a comrade, looked on in horror. How meaningful was independence when foreign corporations and governments could foment rebellions and have elected leaders murdered with impunity? What if the newly freed states were individually too weak to defend themselves against threats from abroad? Nkrumah had called on the newly liberated African states to work together to repel imperialism. Lumumba’s murder was a reminder that unless they did so, “our independence,” as Nkrumah put it, “is meaningless.”

The effort to protect national independence is the subject of Adom Getachew’s extraordinary new book, *Worldmaking After Empire*. Getachew, a political theorist at the University of Chicago, tells the story of a group of leading black anti-imperialists who

Worldmaking After Empire

The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination

By Adom Getachew

Princeton University Press. 288 pp. \$35

sought to secure the freedom of their post-colonial states by turning to international relations. Rather than classify these anti-colonial activists exclusively as nationalists, Getachew argues that they had to become internationalists if they were to realize their nations’ independence. The global hierarchy that put people of color on the bottom and whites on top could be overturned only through concerted and coordinated effort on a worldwide scale. It would require “a radical rupture” and “a reconstitution of the international order” to address deep-seated global inequalities. Recognizing their global ambitions, Getachew calls these black anti-imperialists “worldmakers.” In thinking beyond the nation-state, she argues, they have much to teach us today.

At first, the 20th century looked as if it might be the century of the nation-state. World War I ended with the breakup of the German, Ottoman, and Austro-Hungarian empires, and with that came much talk of self-determination, particularly from Woodrow Wilson, who presided over the post-war settlement. “National aspirations must be respected,” he insisted. “Peoples may now be dominated and governed only by their own consent.” It was on this principle that he proposed a world governed by a league of nations rather than by the empires that had ruled for centuries, and it was on this principle that 42 countries signed on to found such a league.

Yet Wilson’s commitment to self-determination came with an important caveat. He had grown up in the antebellum South—his father wrote a pamphlet titled “Mutual Relations of Masters and Slaves as Taught in the Bible”—and he’d inherited the view that certain people weren’t ready to rule themselves. During Wilson’s presidency, the incendiary racist film *The Birth of a Nation* appeared. It was written by a friend of his and quoted Wilson’s writings. When it seemed that censors concerned about its adulation of the Ku Klux Klan might prevent it from playing, Wilson set the tone by screening it at the White House. The president, W.E.B. Du

Bois observed in what was surely an understatement, “did not seem to understand [the] world-wide problems of race.”

That failure of understanding went far beyond Wilson. For all the state-building in postwar Europe, more than a third of the land on the planet remained colonized. The League of Nations didn’t contest this. Rather, it had its own role in preserving what Getachew calls a worldwide “structure of racial hierarchy.” Though the league upheld the independence of the newly established European nations like Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia, when it came to the lands outside Europe, the league’s view of self-determination proved far more conditional. Instead of liberating the nonwhite domains of World War I’s vanquished empires, the league converted them into a set of quasi-colonies known as mandates, to be governed by outsiders on the understanding that such places weren’t fit to rule themselves. Even the three black countries that made it into the league as independent states—Haiti, Ethiopia, and Liberia—faced accusations of unfitness. While the league’s white leaders turned a blind eye to forced labor in Europe’s colonies, they obsessed over it in Liberia and Ethiopia and openly considered “mandation”—the conversion of sovereign black countries into mandates—as a remedy. Meanwhile, the United States occupied

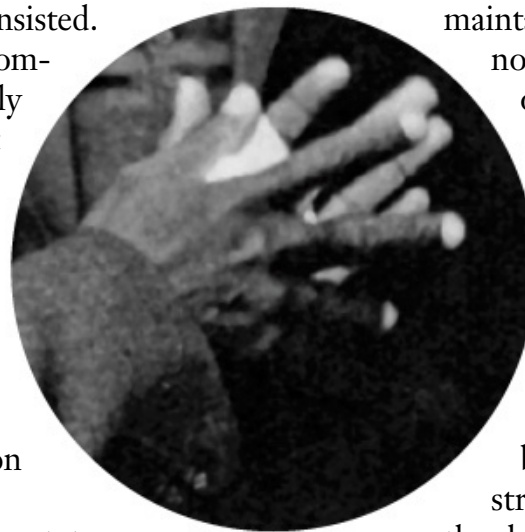
Haiti from 1915 to 1934 in order to maintain “stability.” As Getachew

notes, to the white powers of the world, the very idea of a self-governing black nation appeared “as a contradiction in terms.”

These white powers also did very little when Italy invaded Ethiopia outright in 1935. The conquest of one member state by another was a straightforward violation of

the league’s covenant, and the

league duly condemned it. But Italy hadn’t acted as a defiant rogue power, Getachew notes. Rather, it had presented its reasons in a long memo to the league, explaining that Ethiopia lacked the “necessary qualifications” to be a “civilized” nation. In this, the Italians were only repeating what other white league officials had been saying about Ethiopia: that it was incapable of handling its own affairs. And though the league proposed sanctions on Italy, powerful member states refused to push them too far. Rather than press the issue, they let Italy have Ethiopia.



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Nkrumah, in London at the time, expressed his profound sense of anger at the league's betrayal of an African member. "It was almost as if the whole of London had suddenly declared war on me personally," he recalled. "For the next few minutes I could do nothing but glare at each impassive face, wondering if those people could possibly realize the wickedness of colonialism."

It took World War II to end Italy's reign in Ethiopia and spawn a genuine revolution against colonialism. In the years that followed, other empires would topple as well—first teetering, then collapsing outright. In 1940, nearly one in three of the world's people fell under colonial rule; by 1965, it was about one in 50. "The wind of change is blowing through this continent," announced Harold Macmillan, Britain's conservative prime minister, while touring Africa. "The growth of national consciousness is a political fact."

Nkrumah took pleasure in that fact, but having watched how the great powers treated Ethiopia, Liberia, and Haiti, he doubted it would suffice without the new nations of Africa tackling white imperialism head-on. In his view, the situation required not a change-bearing wind but a "raging hurricane against which the old order cannot

stand." That old order was more than colonialism; it was the whole system of international hierarchy that upheld the rule of white over black.

Nkrumah and his cohort of anti-colonial activists won their fame fighting for the independence of their own countries, but they were nonetheless serious in their border-transcending ambitions. For Getachew, their internationalism helps clarify an underexamined aspect of decolonization. It can't be understood as just an "empire-to-nation narrative"; it also has to be understood as a much more wide-ranging struggle over what kind of international order the world should have.

In Nkrumah's eyes, the problem with the new nation-states was that they weren't strong enough to protect themselves. He looked at independent Africa and saw a balkanized set of "small, weak states." A united Africa, he argued, could pool its resources, plan its economy, and thwart the sort of divide-and-rule tactics that latter-day imperialists used when they backed the Katangan rebels against Lumumba's regime in the Congo. Africa could be like China, Nkrumah believed, poor but large enough to be formidable.

Nkrumah also had another model in mind: the United States. Just as 13 British colonies had joined together in the 18th century to form the United States of America, Nkrumah sought to create a Union of African States from the continent's former colonies. Getachew notes the irony of Nkrumah, a staunch critic of US foreign policy, emulating the country's creation, and she wonders whether the United States—a white settler nation carved out of Native American land—was the most promising model for African liberation. Nevertheless, Nkrumah forged ahead in hot pursuit of a federation. Under his influence, the Ghanaian Constitution contained an astonishing clause allowing the country to fully surrender its sovereignty to a future African Union. Guinea did the same, and the two countries issued a joint communiqué explaining that they'd taken "inspiration from the thirteen American colonies." Mali joined the provisional union as well, and Lumumba, before his murder, traveled to Accra to negotiate the entry of the Congo.

The black intellectual world was a connected one, with ideas taking wing across the Atlantic, and while Nkrumah sought to organize a postcolonial union in Africa, the Trinidadian historian and political leader Eric Williams pursued it in the Caribbean. There, he hoped that regional unification would allow the island states to fend off US meddling. "Two hundred years ago we were sugar plantations," he said. "Today we are naval bases"—a reference to the US outposts that dotted the region, perforating the sovereignty of Caribbean nations. Williams sought to turn the existing British-designed West Indies Federation into a stronger, centrally controlled union of independent Caribbean states. Without this, he feared, the West Indies would devolve into a set of banana republics, riddled with US bases and run by puppet governments.

What might these unions have looked like? In Nkrumah's version, the African Union would have a single currency and market, a single military and foreign policy, and a central government with the power to tax. Getachew shows that unification along these lines had a surprising amount of support among Africa's leaders. Even Nkrumah's adversary in the unification debate, Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie, who favored a looser federation, agreed that "the ultimate destiny of this continent lies in political union."

But Selassie and his allies also worried about handing over too much power to

Book of Dolls 45

God's carpenters are busy putting nails
in the idea of heaven. Make no mistake.
It's hell. If you see my hand shake,
do not worry. It is just the motion
that persists, with or without my knowledge.
I told my mom there was a paradise,
just before she died. Before the end,
words come out. The gallop of these hammers
overhead troubles a dust so ethereal,
I call them *clouds* or *opiates* or *lies*.
If I wake afraid, it is nothing. Only
the creaking of a house, grown small with age.
And so I lay a doll at the door. *Think*
of it as home, I say. And the doll goes in.

BRUCE BOND

a central body. Nigeria's leader Nnamdi Azikiwe spoke of "deep-seated fears" that an overarching government would mean the loss of the independence they had all fought so hard to attain. Nkrumah's opponents worried that the smaller states might be steamrollered by the larger ones in a union, and they had cause for concern. The first president of independent Togo, Sylvanus Olympio, called Nkrumah a "black imperialist"; shortly after, assassins tried to kill Olympio, and it was clear that Ghana was involved. Nkrumah's covert meddling in other African countries made it hard to build trust for his proposal. Instead, African leaders opted for Selassie's solution—to establish the Organization of African Unity, a treaty organization.

Williams wasn't mired in such machinations, but his efforts were also thwarted when Jamaica pulled out of his federation. After this "Jexit," the other islands went their own way, and Trinidad and Tobago gained independence as a separate nation, with a disappointed Williams as its first prime minister.

Nkrumah and Williams feared for the fate of weak nations in a world dominated by great powers, and subsequent events proved them right. The CIA had a "program to neutralize Dr. Williams," Getachew writes, though what that entailed remains unclear. Nkrumah was ousted by his own military in 1966. He claimed the rebels were "egged on by their neo-colonialist masters," and the CIA indeed appears to have coordinated with them. Then-CIA officer John Stockwell wrote that "inside CIA headquarters, the Accra station was given full, if unofficial credit" for the coup.

Whatever the agency's role, Nkrumah's ouster was a "fortuitous windfall" for the United States, as Robert Komer, one of President Lyndon Johnson's advisers, put it. In a confidential memo for Johnson, Komer added that Nkrumah had done "more to undermine our interests than any other black African." The new Ghanaian regime, by contrast, was "almost pathetically pro-Western."

Within a decade of Ghanaian independence, the idea of regional union was no longer in the realm of immediate possibility. Black countries would now have to face a white-dominated world order as individual nation-states and without the concentrated power and leverage of operating in tandem. National sovereignty, which for worldmakers had been merely a first step, was now the final form that black liberation

would take, and there was no China-size black country capable of dictating terms to the world's great powers. Getachew laments this, as did Williams. After the West Indies Federation's collapse in May 1962, Williams summed up the worrisome plight of Trinidad and Tobago as being "a small country in a big world."

Nkrumah and Williams had hoped to lash nation-states together into larger political bodies. But this wasn't the only option the post-colonial worldmakers considered. They also understood that if they could nationalize the raw materials mined, tapped, or grown in poorer countries, they could demand new rules for the world system. The model here wasn't a political union but a cartel—or as Tanzania's President Julius Nyerere put it, "a trade union for the poor." Getachew devotes a chapter to this vision and shows just how far the worldmakers got in their efforts to reshape international relations.

One raw material seemed especially promising: oil. The world oil market had long been dominated by European and US corporations. But in the 1970s, oil exporters coordinated and reversed the terms of

trade, claiming greater shares of revenue and dramatically hiking prices in the process. From 1970 to 1974, the posted price of a barrel of Dubai light crude skyrocketed from \$1.80 to \$13. In the oil-importing West, this was an oil crisis. Exporting countries had a different name for it; they called it an "oil revolution."

The oil revolution emboldened a new generation of worldmakers across the Global South. Through it, they saw a way to address a fundamental injustice in the world economy. "Why does a man growing cocoa earn one tenth of the wage of a man making steel ingots?" asked the St. Lucian economist W. Arthur Lewis. Perhaps, through collective action, these countries could not only raise oil revenues but also set new ground rules to reverse the unfair terms of global trade and overturn an economic hierarchy of nations that ran parallel to the political one. In 1974, they passed a resolution in the United Nations General Assembly announcing a New International Economic Order, one that was intended to redirect resources from rich to poor countries and sharply curtail the power of multinational corporations.

The World Bank's then-policy director, Mahbub ul Haq, compared the New Inter-

Grid

All energy, to the engineer,
or the soul, is the same.

Today's illumination might have come,
way back, from either love or pain—

no whiff, when the light flicked on,
of coal or falling water or uranium.

JAMES RICHARDSON

national Economic Order to the United States' New Deal but on a global scale. Carrying it out would require new institutions of economic governance to tax the rich nations and direct the revenues to the poorer ones. Getachew notes that such an arrangement would have done nothing to secure fairer economies within the countries of the Global South, but she nevertheless recognizes it as a redistributive program of major significance. The architects of the NIEO also grasped its significance: They declared it to be, in the words of Algerian leader Houari Boumédiène, a "decisive turning-point in the course of international relations."

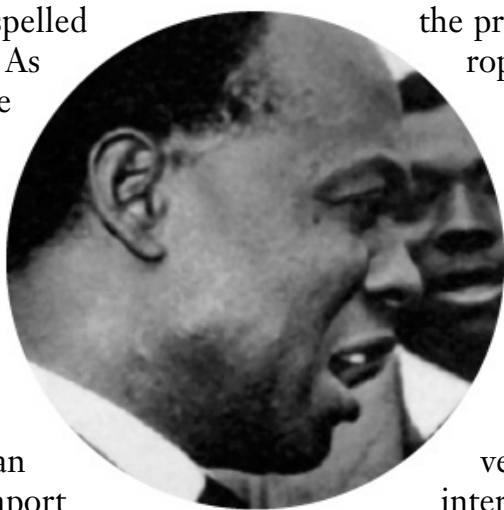
But if the NIEO was such a turning point, it would prove to be one (as G.M. Trevelyan said of Europe's 1848 revolutions) at which history failed to turn. Backstopped by the oil revolution, the NIEO seemed at first to be a serious challenge to the world system. Yet its opponents soon realized they could hold out against it, and ultimately no coordinated campaign emerged from the Global South to force them to agree to the NIEO's terms.

Part of the problem was a lack of unity within the Global South. The oil revolution buoyed hopes, but it also drove a wedge between the oil-exporting countries and the many "NoPEC" nations, for whom rising oil prices spelled economic catastrophe. As nice as it was to see Europe and the United States sweat in the face of price hikes, the hardest-hit countries were the poorest ones. Ghanaian government economists calculated that oil, ballooning in cost, would soon account for more than a fifth of Ghana's total import spending. Solidarity was hard to maintain when oil controls propelled some countries of the Global South into opulence and drove others into debt.

Getachew acknowledges this, but she argues instead that the true cause of the NIEO's end was a "strategic and concerted effort" by the rich countries to bring it down. They certainly tried: As the historians Daniel Sargent and Chris Dietrich have shown using declassified documents, US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger directed a considerable amount of energy toward breaking the NIEO. "Our basic

strategy," he explained, "must be to hold the industrialized powers behind us and to split the Third World." He pressured the rich countries to stand firm in the face of redistributionist demands. To divide his adversaries, he requested hundreds of millions of dollars in aid, designing the aid packages to pry their recipients away from the NIEO coalition. Meanwhile, his colleague Daniel Patrick Moynihan went on the offensive in the United Nations, accusing leaders in the Global South of human rights violations. Kissinger hoped to introduce enough "ambiguities" into the situation to "fuzz it up." This was, Getachew writes, a "counterrevolution against the aspiration for an egalitarian global economy."

Whether because of Kissinger's schemes or the hard realities of the oil economy, the NIEO collapsed. Tanzania's Nyerere, whom Getachew deems the "center of gravity" in African worldmaking after Nkrumah's ouster, was one of the NIEO's chief backers. Yet by 1977 even he could see that a more egalitarian world order was unlikely to take root. His country was one of the NoPEC nations suffering the contractions wrought by rising oil prices. With those contractions came debt, and with debt came the International Monetary Fund and its loans, replete with strings attached. Nyerere stepped down as president in 1985. He did so just before his government adopted a punishing round of IMF-mandated austerity measures—the price of borrowing from European creditors.



Tanzania's fall was all too typical. The debt crisis and death of the NIEO closed off any further opportunities for the postcolonial worldmakers in the 20th century. It wasn't only that they lost power; it was also that the very arena of contestation—international institutions, particularly those clustered around the UN—now mattered less.

The economies of the former colonies have made great strides over the past few decades. In sub-Saharan Africa, average incomes have risen over tenfold and life spans have increased by more than 20 years since 1960. Yet such growth is barely visible when placed alongside that of a rich country like the United States, which saw its economy grow twentyfold in the same period and boasts a per capita GDP almost 40 times that of sub-Saharan Africa. The redistributive equality that the NIEO sought has re-

ceded from view and, with it, the possibility that the black world might dictate terms to international society.

Visionaries like Nkrumah and Williams didn't, in the end, remake the world through regional federations. Nor did their successors through the NIEO. Nevertheless, Getachew is struck by the ambition of these plans. Not only did these worldmakers seek justice on a global scale; they also proposed a collaboration in the Global South so thoroughgoing that it challenged the operating notion that the fundamental units of international society should be nation-states. Remarkably, such ideas had enough momentum to panic governments in the Global North.

Today, we inhabit a world defined by the failure of this new order to emerge. The decades since the NIEO's collapse have seen a "striking return to and defense of a hierarchical international order" under the unilateral power of the United States, Getachew writes. The measure of this power is not just that the United States has successfully defied international norms but also that the very idea of an egalitarian world order—once a serious historical possibility—now seems to many an absurd fantasy.

Getachew's book, however, hopes to revive this neglected history in order to show that it was more than a "dead end"; it can serve as a "staging ground for reimagining the future." Getachew couldn't have picked a better time to publish a book excavating a more egalitarian internationalism from the past. Brexit and Trumpism have shown that the old powers can no longer lead international institutions. And the drastic heating of the planet has shown how ineffectual nation-states have been at tackling problems of planetary scope. The question now is what a future world order will look like. Will regional federations grow or, as we are seeing in the European Union, threaten to break apart? Will the nations of the Global South join together? Will a powerful international body arise to stave off climate change?

Getachew doesn't offer solutions, nor does she propose that the decades-old ideas of the anti-imperial worldmakers be revived intact; her book, after all, is primarily a work of history. But she does ask us to return to an earlier moment of bold creativity, when an egalitarian world order was imaginable, and when thinkers from the Global South set to work to bring it about. We could use more of that. ■



FIRE AND BRIMSTONE

The entwined lives of Françoise Gilot and Pablo Picasso

by JILLIAN STEINHAUER

Early on in their relationship, the painter and writer Françoise Gilot almost left Pablo Picasso. It was 1946, and the pair had gone from Paris to the South of France for the summer. It sounds romantic and likely would have been, if Picasso hadn't insisted that they stay in the house he had given to the photographer Dora Maar, his partner before Gilot. Maar wasn't around, but soon after they arrived, Picasso began receiving devoted daily letters from yet another former lover, Marie-Thérèse Walter, which he would read aloud every morning. As if that weren't enough, the place was overrun with

scorpions. Suddenly, Gilot found herself stuck in a "hostile environment," as she writes in her memoir, *Life With Picasso*, which was originally published in 1964 and recently rereleased by New York Review Books.

Over the previous three years, Gilot and Picasso—who were 21 and 61, respectively, when they met—had a drawn-out courtship and then spent a short period living together in Picasso's Paris studio. The relationship hadn't been entirely smooth, but it had been magnetic and intimate. Gilot had met Maar in Paris, but Southern France was where Gilot realized for the first time how much Picasso's former partners remained a part of his life. Later in the book, she calls this a "heavy load of his far-from-dead past, which

was beginning to seem like an albatross around my neck."

So, in a decision that seemed half logical and half panicked, Gilot did the only thing she could think of. She fled. One day while Picasso was out for a drive, she left the house and decided to hitchhike to Marseille; she hadn't been at it long before Picasso came by and picked her up. After reprimanding and trying to comfort her, he offered up his grand solution for Gilot's problems: She should have a baby. "It was just as though he had told me that I ought to learn how to sole shoes," she writes; in other words, "a very practical thing to know but not at all urgent just at the moment." Picasso, however, was insistent. "You are developed only on the intellectual

Jillian Steinbauer is a writer based in Brooklyn and a former senior editor of Hyperallergic.

level. Everywhere else you're retarded," he said. "You won't know what it means to be a woman until you have a child."

Gilot was skeptical, but she was also in love, so she heeded Picasso's advice and became pregnant shortly thereafter. She would stay with him for another seven years and have a second baby after another difficult run-in with one of his exes, the ballet dancer Olga Khokhlova. Gilot was fifth in a line of long-term partners (in addition to many more lovers and girlfriends) who not only inspired but also supported Picasso through the ups and downs of both his temper and his career. He left the first four of them and died while married to the sixth. Gilot, who in the summer of 1953 took her children and left, was the only one to walk away.

Many writers have devoted books to Picasso, from memoirs to academic tomes to biographies; the art historian John Richardson alone penned four volumes chronicling his 91 years of life. In fact, books about Picasso have become their own kind of cottage industry, which helps fuel his reputation as one of the world's greatest artists. The appearance of each one seems to quietly bolster a long-standing premise: that here is a man continually worth discussing—and forgiving—because he was a genius who can never be fully understood.

Life With Picasso, which Gilot cowrote with the journalist and art critic Carlton Lake, was an unusual entry in the genre when it appeared in 1964. The closest analogue was *Picasso et Ses Amis*, a memoir by Fernande Olivier, the artist's first partner, which was published in French in 1933 and coincidentally released in English the same year as *Life With Picasso*. Like Olivier's, Gilot's book is neither scholarly nor reverential but rather a tell-all of the couple's time together, from their first meeting—by chance at a restaurant in Paris in May 1943, during the German occupation—to the bitter aftermath of their breakup. It's intimate and gossipy as well as clear-eyed and insightful. It takes the larger-than-life figure of Picasso and repaints him as a brilliant but insecure artist and a loving but tyrannical man. It is an excruciatingly honest book.

No doubt for that reason, Picasso did not want to see it published. According to the introduction to the new edition, he initiated three lawsuits in an attempt to stop it, while some 40 French artists and intellectuals signed a petition to ban the book. (He tried to prevent Olivier's

Life With Picasso

By Françoise Gilot and Carlton Lake
New York Review Books. 384 pp. \$17.95

memoir from being published, too.) After it came out, Richardson skewered *Life With Picasso* in the *New York Review of Books*, calling it "wretched" and accusing its author of "indiscretion masquerading as candor" and a "chip-on-shoulder malice which permeates—and ultimately invalidates—much of this book." (Richardson later reversed course and became friends with Gilot; a favorable blurb by him appears on the back cover of the new edition.) Picasso, for his part, took out his fury on his two children with Gilot. After the book came out, he never saw them again.

Fifty-five years later, this furor seems almost laughable. Although his popularity hasn't dimmed, it has generally become known that Picasso was calculating, cruel, and misogynistic. After his death in 1973, the bodies of his loved ones piled up, as two of his former partners and one of his grandsons killed themselves. Other people wrote books about the misery he had inflicted, including his granddaughter Marina Picasso and Arianna Huffington, whose biography of the artist was turned into the movie *Surviving Picasso*. His dictum about there being "only two kinds of women—goddesses and doormats," which Gilot repeats in her memoir, is a well-known quote rather than an upsetting revelation.

If the defenses of Picasso's genius were abundant in 1964, the depictions of him as a monster are no longer in short supply. And the predominance of those polarities is, in fact, what makes *Life With Picasso* such a fascinating read: Gilot manages to portray him as both. In her telling, Picasso is neither beyond praise nor reproach. He mistreats her and teaches her, breaks artistic ground even as he remains retrograde in his personal life. Gilot's Picasso—as well as the pair's relationship—is complicated and painfully human.

By the time she met Picasso, Gilot had determined that she was going to be an artist. "I was twenty-one and I felt already that painting was my whole life," she writes. But her domineering father didn't approve, and in a harrowing confrontation at her grandmother's house, he tried to beat her into submission. It's against this backdrop that she meets Picasso, who, in addition to being 40 years her senior, is already famous, though not quite the superstar he would soon become. She

understands him to be a like-minded soul and someone who speaks her language, "a friend whose nature was not very far from my own."

Picasso encourages Gilot's art from the start, visiting an exhibition of her paintings and telling her to "keep on working—hard—every day." At the same time, he develops a romantic interest in her, kissing her and testing her reaction. As she visits his studio more frequently, art and romance become further intertwined. Picasso teaches her about printmaking, and the two debate the merits of nonfigurative painting, all while falling in love. The first time Gilot undresses for him, Picasso seems to be studying her more with the eye of an artist than a potential lover. "You know, it's incredible the degree to which I had prefigured your form," he tells her from across the room. Yet by the end of that encounter, which Gilot describes as wonderfully gentle, she no longer sees him as just an abstraction, "the great painter that everyone knew about and admired"; in that moment, he becomes a real person.

However, as their relationship gathers steam, there are warning signs. Picasso is moody; he whines that he needs Gilot and therefore she must come and live with him; he forces her into several excruciating meetings with Maar in order to prove that he and the photographer are no longer together; he even grabs and pushes Gilot into the parapet of a bridge at one point, threatening to throw her into the Seine. She sees these red flags and tries to keep her distance at times, but Picasso becomes, for her, "a challenge I could not turn down." A friend warns her that the relationship is headed for catastrophe. "I told her she was probably right but I felt it was the kind of catastrophe I didn't want to avoid," Gilot confesses. She moves in with him.

As *Life With Picasso* progresses, a curious thing happens: Its author disappears. Not literally, of course, but as a character, Gilot fades into the background. The story becomes a series of vignettes about the workings of Picasso's world—his relationships with other artists, art dealers, and other women; his artistic processes; his deep insecurities; his strange habits and beliefs. Gilot enters the picture only in relation to him. She remains our guide but a stoic one, as we lose sight of her inner life and hear less and less about her own artwork; she even stops painting for three years after moving in with him. Writing as though she's on guard against being accorded the status of victim, she shares few feelings about the particulars

of her new life, which include getting a depressed Picasso out of bed every morning and being forced to manage his paperwork “much against [her] will.”

When she’s pregnant with their first child, Picasso—who sees the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan rather than a traditional physician—forbids her to visit a doctor because of his superstitions. About this she simply writes, “Pablo was against the idea because he felt that if one looked after such things too carefully, it might bring bad luck.” And then, casually, “About a week before the baby was to be born I was beginning to be quite excited and I decided it was time to do something,” by which she means finally seeing an obstetrician.

Yet along the way, even as the romance begins to deteriorate, there is intellectual sustenance that keeps things afloat. The book details long, passionate conversations about the creation and meaning of art between Picasso, Gilot, and a host of others, notably Matisse. She witnesses Picasso’s breakthroughs in ceramics and sculpture and entertains his theories. He does most of the talking but is portrayed as a visionary. He calls painting “a dramatic action in the course of which reality finds itself split apart”; explains that in his sculptures, he “achieve[s] reality through the use of metaphor”; and proclaims, “The right to free expression is something one seizes, not something one is given.”

Even if his ego sometimes gets in the way—over the course of one discussion, he compares himself to Hegel, Shakespeare, and Jesus—Picasso comes across as a wise mentor and devoted artist, someone who has dedicated his existence to his work. Alongside him, Gilot holds her own as an insightful observer and critic, writing about her milieu with equal parts poetry and precision, as when she describes the Swiss sculptor Alberto Giacometti’s work as “almost something static in the process of becoming dynamic through its intention.”

Gilot applies her powers of observation to the most devastating effect when she analyzes Picasso’s relationships with women. In one brutally honest passage, she writes:

He had a kind of Bluebeard complex that made him want to cut off the heads of all the women he had collected in his little private museum. But he didn’t cut the heads off entirely. He preferred to have life go on and to have all those women who had shared his life at one moment or another still letting out little peeps

and cries of joy or pain and making a few gestures like disjointed dolls, just to prove there was some life left in them, that it hung by a thread, and that he held the other end of the thread.

In this way, *Life With Picasso* almost becomes two books—one about the escapades of Picasso the artist in the 1940s and ’50s and another about the love and turmoil between him and Gilot. Of course, the latter wins out, as she gradually regains her sense of self and reemerges as the protagonist of her own life. This is prompted in part by her grandmother’s death, which leaves Gilot with a “heightened sense of individual solitude.” Around the same time, after she notices that Picasso has pulled away emotionally, he begins cheating on her and then denies it when she confronts him. She comes to realize that he’s incapable of being a true emotional partner, so she must leave. He responds with fire-and-brimstone-style threats:

You imagine people will be interested in *you*?... They won’t ever, really, just for yourself. Even if you think people like you, it will only be a kind of curiosity they will have about a person whose life has touched mine so intimately. And you’ll be left with only the taste of ashes in your mouth. For you, reality is finished; it ends right here. If you attempt to take a step outside my reality—which has become yours, inasmuch as I found you when you were young and unformed and I burned everything around you—you’re headed straight for the desert. And if you go, that’s exactly what I wish for you.

Some two years after Gilot departs, Picasso moves out of their home in southern France and disposes without warning of almost everything she hadn’t gone back for yet—her artwork and books, letters from friends (including Matisse), and gifts from Picasso himself. He tells dealers not to work with her. He continues, to the best of his ability, to burn everything around her. Nonetheless, she ends on a note of gratitude, thanking him for forcing her to “discover myself and thus to survive.” As ever, she doesn’t dwell on her losses or delve into her anger or pain. In a sense, she doesn’t need to, because the book she’s written is the ultimate payback. She got her revenge by telling the truth.

When I learned about Picasso in my art history classes, I did not learn about Gilot, who went on to have a long life (she’s still with us, at 97) and career in art—or about his other partners: Olivier, the model who was Picasso’s companion while he was inventing Cubism; Khokhlova, who became his first wife; Walter, who was only 17 when she and Picasso, then 45, began having an affair; Maar, the photographer, painter, and poet; and Jacqueline Roque, Picasso’s final partner and the person he painted more pictures of than anyone else. If they were mentioned, it was as muses, the inspiration (or fodder) for the master’s brilliant artwork, not as creators, collaborators, and independent people in their own right.

That has begun to change. In recent years, art museums and galleries have mounted shows that spotlight these women, and not solely in relation to Picasso. It’s a welcome step, though a carefully considered and cautious one. The female lovers are allowed to enter the institution through the domain of the special or temporary exhibition, while the male genius remains cemented in the foundation.

What’s more, even as we work to round out the story of 20th century art, there’s a part of it that is still stubbornly being elided: the realities of Picasso’s use and abuse of women. Textbooks and institutional wall labels avoid the topic; his extensive Wikipedia page barely mentions it. Some argue that Picasso’s behavior isn’t relevant to his artistic accomplishments. But one need only glance at his work to see this isn’t true. His personal life fed his professional life, supplying him with models and inspiration. Making art represented many things to him—both lofty ideals about the disruption of reality and, it seems, a form of control. “Painting women’s portraits was one way Picasso thought he seduced them,” Gilot told *The New York Times Magazine* in 1996. “I felt entirely free and independent of his portraits. I did not define myself by them, put myself inside them. And that is the reason I am still around.” It may also be the reason Gilot was able to see her ex as more than just a monster.

For almost a century, Picasso’s very real achievements have served to obscure his abuse of women. What would happen if, rather than using his genius to excuse or justify that abuse, we started to give both equal weight? We could reconceive them as akin to color and line—two elements of the same picture. ■



UPSTAIRS, DOWNSTAIRS

The politics of Bong Joon-ho's *Parasite*

by E. TAMMY KIM

The South Korean filmmaker Bong Joon-ho has called his latest movie, *Parasite*, a “sad comedy.” It’s an imperfect label, though *Parasite*—which won the Palme d’Or at the 2019 Cannes Film Festival—did make me laugh, sometimes hysterically. It also made me feel low, even miserable, though probably not for the reasons Bong intended.

The plot centers on two nuclear families living in Seoul, one poor and one rich, one downstairs and one upstairs. Ki-taek (played by the formidable South Kore-

an actor Song Kang-ho), the patriarch of the working-class Kim family, lives with his wife, Chung-sook, and their adult son and daughter, Ki-woo and Ki-jung, in a half-basement apartment redolent of sewage and thick, hand-washed socks that refuse to dry. (*Ki*, which can be rendered as *Gi*, is also the first syllable of the film’s Korean title, *Gisaengchung*.) The Kims’ neighborhood is of the old, scrappy South Korean style, cramped and low to the ground, a tenement in the shadow of the city’s cookie-cutter apartment towers. Ki-taek is an unemployed taxi driver, Chung-sook a washed-up hammer-throw champion, and the two children failed their university entrance exams. They take in sundry piece-

work, like folding pizza boxes, to survive while on the lookout for a way up.

One night, Ki-woo’s friend stops by to ask a favor. He’s leaving to study abroad and needs someone trustworthy to take over his tutoring gig in a tony household. Ki-woo agrees and is soon at the Park family’s Glass House-style mansion, fake academic credentials in hand. He is received by Moon-gwang, the Parks’ live-in domestic worker (played by the prolific comic actress Lee Jung-eun), and introduced to most of the family: Yeon-kyo, a neurotic but well-meaning stay-at-home mom; daughter Da-hye, a horny high school sophomore and Ki-woo’s student-to-be; and Da-song, a ram-bunctious young boy. The father, Nathan,

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an IT executive, is at the office, per usual, working typically punishing hours. (South Koreans log an average of more than 2,000 hours per year, compared with the OECD average of 1,700.) The Parks, though, are not from the old-money chaebol class (the dynasties that own megaconglomerates like Samsung and Hyundai) but are part of the nouveau riche obsessed with English and with Western luxury goods.

Ki-woo gets the job and a new American sobriquet, Kevin—Yeon-kyo's idea. He's paid lavishly for his first tutoring session and glimpses a world of opportunity in the envelope she hands him, stuffed with pristine 50,000-won (about \$42) notes. What if his sister, father, and mother could work for the Park household, too? Ki-woo devises an extensive con and, soon enough, persuades the Park family to hire his sister as an art tutor and therapist to Da-song, his mother to replace the faithful Moon-gwang, and his father to assume the role of chauffeur to Nathan. All goes well until this family of hangers-on discovers and is discovered by a competing family of parasites. The inevitable face-off begins in the mansion's subbasement, under the clueless Parks' feet, and culminates in a masterfully bloody, baroque finale that implicates everyone in the house. Bong's message seems to be that there are consequences to our obscene division of wealth and labor. In his account, though, it's inevitable that the parasites will bleed most.

Parasite is a marvelously tense, propulsive film of sharp angles, smells, and cold light. Bong, a talented cartoonist, is known for his obsessive storyboarding, and *Parasite*, like his previous films, deploys the grotesque, hyperbolic elements of a comic strip in service of social commentary. Many critics have praised the film for its stylized critique of capitalism: As *No Cut News*, a South Korean outlet, observed, the movie asks, "Why do the rich only get richer and the poor, poorer?"

This, I think, gives Bong too much credit. He wants to poke fun at the wealthy and lightly satirize our social divides, in the tradition of Luis Buñuel's *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*. But that's as far as he's willing to go.

In interviews, Bong has described *Parasite* as an allegory of polarization: The two families, rich and poor, should exist on an even plane as human beings in the same metropolis but assume the roles of titular parasite and host (the title of his 2006 science fiction hit). Nathan repeatedly opines that a good servant is one who "doesn't cross

the line," who doesn't become too intimate with or demand too much from his employers. This is untenable and a problem for the rich, Bong said on France Inter radio's *L'heure Bleue*. "If you're so concerned with boundaries, then you should do [the work] yourself"—and yet the moneyed would rather outsource this labor. "You can't maintain your own castle. So you let in a tutor for the kids, a housemaid, a driver, and they cross the line."

It's only through relations of service and subservience that the prosperous and destitute have occasion to meet. "The rich and poor don't eat at the same restaurants or take the same flights," Bong added. "I want us to be able to live together. I hope for my son that we'll one day have a mixed society, a coexistence between the rich and the poor."

Here, then, is where *Parasite* takes us: not to the ledge of class war but to a shrug over inequality. The parasitic family members of his film have embraced a long con because the system itself is a con. Yet their suffering, in housing and work, is rationalized by their vulgarity and unscrupulousness. The rich family's lifestyle, meanwhile, is never questioned. What bothers Bong is not the fact of poverty and unjust distribution; he only wants our social arrangements to feel a bit kinder. Never mind that a truly mixed society would demand slicing off the extremes.

This is not to plead for agitprop. Bong is too good a filmmaker for that. It's simply to temper our political expectations of *Parasite*. If anything, his earlier movies offered more in the way of straightforward social critique. *The Host*, for instance, which introduced him to Western audiences, is a monster flick partly about American militarism and environmental crimes. Caricatures of capitalism and state power run through *Snowpiercer*, a postapocalyptic allegory set on a segregated train, and *Memories of Murder*, based on an unsolved string of real-life rapes and killings in a rural area of South Korea. (Last month, the police announced that they had located a likely perpetrator in that case.) These films put humor and overstatement to more provocative use.

South Korea's best filmic interpreter of class and social inequality is not Bong but Lee Chang-dong, who made last year's elegiac *Burning* as well as *Poetry* (2010) and one of my all-time favorites, *Peppermint Candy* (1999). But Lee is too understated to draw the kinds of audiences that Bong can. Asked about his hopes for *Parasite*, Bong said that it "is in parts funny, frightening, and sad, and if it makes viewers feel like sharing a drink and talking over all the ideas



*Artistic Dispatches
From the Front Lines
of Resistance*



Phantoms / Edel Rodriguez

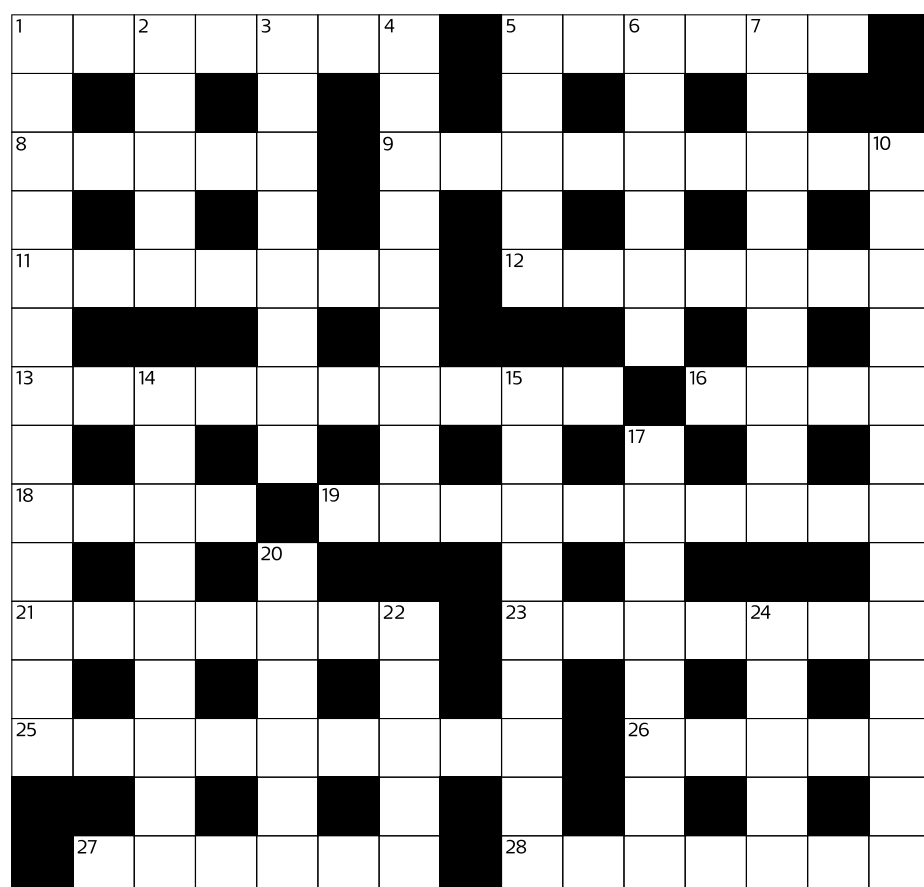
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they had while watching it, I'll wish for nothing more." Which ideas does he have in mind? Inequality, betrayal, and a kind of we're-all-doing-our-best both-sides-ism are most apparent. The film doesn't push us further—to mull South Korea's crisis of affordable housing, discrimination against the poor, fetishization of English and of Western commodities, and glut of overeducated, underemployed youths driving the parasitic family's scheme.

Bong deserves kudos, though, for inserting a bit of wry geopolitical commentary. We're told that the subbasement of the Parks' mansion where the poor characters battle it out was built as a bunker in case of an attack by North Korea. In mocking recognition of this fact, the dueling clans compare their struggle to the North Korean nuclear standoff, and Moon-gwang launches into a long, histrionic impersonation of a North Korean news announcer. It's an odd scene, a sort of tonal tangent. But I wonder if Bong's point is this: that the North Korean bogeyman, which features so prominently in the apocalyptic imagination of South Korea and the United States, is not the real enemy. The chasm between rich and poor, in wealth and opportunity and respect, is likely to kill us first. ■

Puzzle No. 3519

JOSHUA KOSMAN AND HENRI PICCIOTTO



ACROSS

- 1 Weirdly precise sets of instructions (7)
 5 Fall with hesitation into tuna salad (6)
 8 Cut and burn to get hot (5)
 9 **R**estitutions (9)
 11 Twins do become mixed up in a kind of strike... (3-4)
 12 ...in epic Colorado wind (7)
 13 In Burton, I see menace (10)
 16 Car, initially for Ike and Tina (4)
 18 Be next to large orchestral instrument, facing left (4)
 19 Design for efficiency, therefore without amplification (10)
 21 Sketchy donor is protected from the elements (7)
 23 Like 26's bridge feat in two clubs (7)
 25 Review sci-fi film with phosphorus filling pit at the top of the world (5,4)
 26 Religious believers back hotels on the outskirts of university (5)

- 27 Practice Prohibitionist campaign? (3,3)
 28 Gets involved with evil that results from marriage? (5,2)

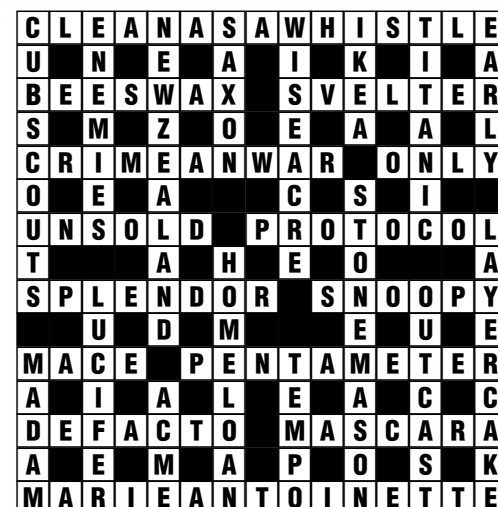
DOWN

- 1 Reviving addict rejected smuggler's original quote (13)
 2 Toothpaste found in public restroom (5)
 3 What? Porn made unacceptable? (6,2)
 4 Consumer activist supports withered singer (9)
 5 Total commercial scam never reaches completion (3,2)
 6 Turning false into true in European ditch (6)
 7 Dictator's security concealing rise of independent defeat (9)
 10 Newspaper department features every letter from inspector again and again (6,7)
 14 One making a loud noise, submerged in the river (9)
 15 Cheating lovers, beginning to trust without Mister Savage (3-6)
 17 Gather fuel to escape capital of Eritrea (8)
 20 Disturb the two of them even more so? (6)
 22 Faint white lines after a short while (5)
 24 Makes aromatic plants (5)

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 3518

ACROSS 1 CLEA (anag.) + NASA + WHI(ST)LE 9 BEES + WAX 10 S-[m/V]-ELTER 11 CRIME + ANWAR 12 hidden 14 UN + S + OLD 15 PRO + TO(C)OL 18 SP(LEND)OR[t] 20 pun 22 2 defs. 23 PEN + TAME + TER[m] 26 DEF + ACTO[r] 27 MA + SCAR + A 28 letter bank

DOWN 1 C(UBS)COUTS (*bus* anag., *stucco* anag.) 2 anag. 3 "gnus, eland" 4 S + AXON 5 W + I + SEA + CRE[w] 6 IKE + A 7 anag. 8 pun 13 S + TONE + MA + SON 16 LA(Y + ERCA)KE (*race* anag.) 17 HO[w] + MELO(A)N 19 LUC(IF)ER (*ulcer* anag.) 21 OU(TCA)ST (*act* rev.) 22 MADAM [I'm Adam] 24 TE(M)PO (*poet* anag.) 25 AC(M)E



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The Amazon, the planet's largest rainforest, has lost at least 17% of its forest cover in the last half century through clearing, mainly for **cattle grazing and vast soybean farms**.³



In Indonesia, another biodiversity hotspot home to orangutans, rhinos, and tigers, key islands have lost 85% of their forest due to conversion to **palm oil plantations**.⁴

Loss of forests' cooling and water cycling services is also causing warming and drying both in the local area of deforestation and globally. For example, deforestation in the Amazon is predicted to **decrease rainfall** in the US Midwest, Northwest, and parts of the South during the agricultural season.⁵



Forest loss may be near a planetary boundary or **tipping point**. After passing the tipping point threshold, forests loss may be irreversible and move Earth's climate to a "hothouse state" due to loss of carbon sequestration and climate regulation.⁶



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¹ <http://whrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/HoughtonEnvSust.12.pdf>

² <https://www.worldwildlife.org/threats/deforestation-and-forest-degradation>

³ Ibid.

⁴ theicct.org/sites/default/files/publications/Indonesia-palm-oil-expansion_ICCT_july2016.pdf

⁵ Lawrence, D., Vandecar, K., (2014) Effects of tropical deforestation on climate and agriculture, Nature Climate Change, vol. 5, pages 27–36.

⁶ <https://massivesci.com/articles/rainforest-deforestation-tipping-point-collaps/>